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A CANDLE  
TO THE STARS



# A CANDLE TO THE STARS

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

THE best journalism is the best literature.

But that's the apex of the triangle. There's a devil of a difference at the base.

Journalism is a butterfly, dead on the morrow. And I should hate to think that in this entomological exhibition you saw the pins.

For this stuff is journalism. Is it dead? Or are some of my butterflies still alive and fluttering? Is it so certain that journalism must be dead on the morrow?

And what is the essential difference between journalism and literature? A news-story deals with a thing of the moment. But then so does a sonnet—the moment's monument.

Perhaps journalism differs from literature by ignoring the intimate connection between what Mr. Bernard Shaw has for breakfast and the eternal destiny of man.

For monuments are not done at the moment. The artist must put by his emotion, or keep it simmering on a low flame, so that he may use it in tranquillity.

And there's a true difference. For commonly your journalist must not await the tranquil hour, but must write in the tumult of the momentary reaction.

Tranquil hour, indeed! Did Wordsworth ever have to catch a train with the first edition, or Keats make his corrections on the Stone?

Yet sometimes a journalist is able to speed up his emotional process so that the tranquil hour is his before there's a stage-wait in the machine-room.

Then you may get literature.

But as a rule the habit of journalism done in a rush for the next edition breeds a certain impatient haste

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that will not wait for the right word, is content with the second-best phrase, the blurred impression.

The true distinction between journalism and literature is a difference of style.

Of course I know that there is writing that trades under the name of literature, and is nothing at all—has no relation whatever to common experience. Compared with such bunk the honest account of a murder in *The News of the World* is immortal prose.

But where do I come in with my little lot? I don't know. Many of the impressions recorded here were got at interviews for immediate publication in the Press. In as many cases I was able to await the happy hour. In a number of cases (in the case of Shaw, Wells, Chesterton, Epstein, McNabb, Tomlinson, Barnard, Nevinson, Robeson, Dean, Miss Baylis and Sir Harry Lauder) I knew my subject so well that my impression of him or her has never been set at the hazard of haste. What is the result?

This is a new book. There are some quotations, mainly of talk, from published interviews. But I have painted a fresh portrait of each of my victims, except where I saw my sitter only once: there I find I must accept my first expression.

The book is a collection of interviews, of portraits. Every true interview must be a portrait, as its name implies. And, since a portrait must be *by* somebody, and is ten times as valuable if you can allow for the artist's personal equation, I have often shown the candle hob-nobbing with the stars.

Indeed I am sure that no interview is worth anything unless the interviewer is named and known. After all, it is an *inter*-view.

Some of the portraits are the merest sketches, but most of them are painted in detail. I have tried to give the person in his looks, his gestures, his talk, his habits and affections.

An interview must be a portrait, even though it is

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all talk, all opinion, or all fact. What is said matters little unless I know what like he was who said it.

Well, there may be other sorts of interview. But that's my sort. And it's the human sort. The hunger for gossip about notable folk derives from a natural desire to meet and know those who are supposed to represent us. Where the gossip-monger goes wrong is in recording insignificant things, usually concerning insignificant people.

Now this book is chock-full of gossip; but I submit that it is significant, and about significant men and women.

We have, as the gossip-monger needs sometimes to be reminded, our private lives. But public life should not be a private conspiracy. We have a right to *know* our public persons, for what they are explains what they do.

Unfortunately our public life is in fact a private conspiracy, and our politicians are very private persons indeed. It follows that the only politicians I have been able to portray are Mr. Lansbury, who is not a politician at all, and Mr. John Burns, whose honesty always baulked his boyish desire to become one.

And I must confess that I am glad of it. If I have the gentle art of making enemies—and I trust that I have not—certainly I make no hand at writing about them. Many of my sitters I know well, some of them are my close friends, none is my enemy. I cannot see a man at all unless I like him, and every showing-up would be a betrayal.

I like all my subjects, and I want you to like them. I indicate their weakness only to reveal their strength. I deal in men and women, not in monsters. If you want to be shocked this book will bore you.

W.R.T.



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**A CANDLE  
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# I

## GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

G.B.S. is either delightfully easy to interview, or quite impossible. You exhaust every device known to warfare. You assault the gates of his citadel—in the Adelphi the stairs had actually a grille across them—with the heaviest artillery and the most seductive serenades. And nothing happens. Oh, well, you get a polite note from Shaw's perfect secretary, or once in a while a postcard from Shaw himself, telling you to go to Jericho.

Once I wrote asking him to give me an article for *G.K.'s Weekly*—I was assistant-editor of Chesterton's paper at the time—on the grounds that we were doing badly, and needed a buck up. He replied that he hoped the paper would die, for G.K.C. was wasting his time on it. He believed that the old man would get into the New Jerusalem, but not on the back of half a dozen donkeys, not even on the back of a donkey as well-intentioned as myself.

On another occasion when I wanted him to speak at an annual dinner, he instructed me, by telephone, that I might tell the gentlemen concerned, with his compliments, to go to hell.

Such incidents are discouraging. But, if you keep a stout heart, and—to resume our military figure—trust in God and keep your powder dry, one day you will march up to the gates in full formation (sharpshooters behind a screen of lute-players) and find the gate open, and a gracious voice crying: “Ask Mr. Titterton to come in.”

Inside you are greeted as if you were the one man

Shaw wants to see. He is so friendly, his voice caresses you—though there is a delicate hint of mockery in the raised eyebrows—his smile is the largess of a knight, his manners are a perfect salutation.

No doubt he will tell you that he behaves like that because without a rule of the road you get collisions. But you mustn't believe him. He behaves like that by the grace of God and the articles of his association.

Nor has he mellowed to this merely in his old age. Twenty-five years ago I went to get from him a reply to Frank Harris's attack on "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets." And Shaw . . . But there! Let me begin at the beginning, and tell you how Shaw struck me when first I saw him some thirty-seven years ago.

When first I came near to Shaw—I was not yet in touch with him—he was a red-headed and red-bearded Irishman devoted to Fabian propaganda. I say *Fabian* rather than Socialist, because, though I joined the Society, I regarded Fabianism as feeble stuff. We young revolutionaries asked for the wine of life, and they gave us a tract on municipal beerhouses.

But there was nothing feeble about Shaw. Strange to say, he seemed to me the perfect revolutionary, the perfect soldier: always mindful of commissariat and ammunition, but never unmindful of the war. In fact, he was always fighting—he trailed his coat. He rose to speak, whether at Clifford's Inn (where the Fabians met), the Albert Hall, a tuppenny-ha'penny branch meeting, or the street corner, blithely imperturbable, aggressively urbane, and *slew*—without malice as without mercy, but with a pious joy.

Earnest? *Of course* the man was in earnest—colossal-ly in earnest. He flamed with his purpose, but the eyes lighted up at the sparks.

Certainly I have heard him score debating-points, not that he thought the end justified the means, but that he felt a good war justified any argument.

"Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen . . ."  
The delicious ironical flirtation of that Irish brogue!

You would have said that he lived for such moments when he rose, swift as a sword from its scabbard, and then, hands in trousers pockets, at leisure and at ease, launched his lightning attack.

You might have thought that he spent his off-duty time in the exercise of friendship—for which he had a genius—and in keeping fit for the battle by means of physical and mental jerks.

You might have thought thus, had you not known that he had the industry, not, like his friend Mr. Sidney Webb, of an ant, but of a bee.

There he stands, slim, trim, alert, and gallant—yes, gallant every inch of him, his hands veiled now in the pockets of his well-cut rough tweed jacket. His head is cocked sideways provocatively, his red beard juts out like a challenge, his face looks as if it came fresh from the wash and a rough towelling, his eyebrows—by art or by nature, have an archly diabolical lift.

Out comes a hand, he gazes into the cup of it. Up comes the head, a shaft flies, with a silent friendly gush of laughter he registers, his point scored; a huge echo of laughter from the house follows. The face becomes serious, a hand grasps the red beard, you are being scolded—or the world is, it amounts to the same thing. The scourge bites; it is wielded with calm, almost with insolent calm, yet there is a white-hot passion for justice in every blow.

The pose relaxes, the trim figure swaggers—jauntily yet with sure restraint. Hands and eyebrows make play. Out comes an epigram—a flock of epigrams—the hall roars. But the speaker remains calm and cool, supremely self-controlled. He ends on the very tick of his climax, yet as though casually subsiding with no more to say.

A perfect piece of acting! Is the man a mere poseur? Only a fool would think that, and a good many fools have said it.

I will tell you the truth of the matter. Shaw was

then a man with a sufficiency of self-conceit and entirely without vanity. He believed that certain things were necessary to salvation—the salvation of others, his own election being sure. He wished, he willed with all his soul to convince those others of their need. He was prepared to use the man Shaw with his tricks of mind and body—to use him in any way in order to convince them. He took joy in the perfection of the instrument and the craft of the artist, but his aim was undivided and unalterable and as serious as life and death. When people called him a poseur he replied : “ Of course ! ”

Any gesture, even a romantic gesture, was permissible, provided it served a public, an ethical purpose. He revelled in the gestures. But it is fine to know that he never has done anything merely for applause, just as it is sad to think that he has never done anything merely for fun.

No man is ever a hero to his own valet—or his own doctor. And Shaw has always been valeted and vetted by Shaw. Neither does he abase himself. He might conceivably go to the stake for his opinions—he has been grilled for them—though he would not go without some contemptuous bantering of his tormentors, and a keen annoyance at the folly of the whole proceeding. But he might consider that the survival of Shaw would more than balance the harm of a recantation ; he would not mind in the least being called a coward.

Once when Shaw was speaking—I forget when and where—an Anarchist named Tocatti got up, and remarked truculently : “ It’s all very well for Shaw to talk ”—I forget about what—“ but while Cunningham Graham was fighting the police in Trafalgar Square on Bloody Sunday (1887), Shaw was running away.”

Shaw rose, quite at his ease, and replied : “ My friend Tocatti is in error. It is true that I was in Trafalgar Square upon the occasion that he mentions.

It is true that I went away. But the civilised man does not run away. I walked away."

Rather a thin defence? No defence at all! If Tocatti was such a fool as to think that Shaw would stay to be bludgeoned by the police when no good purpose could be served—so much the worse for Tocatti. If the public thought Shaw a coward—so much the better for them.

Had Shaw a certain contempt for the average sensual man? Well, as I have said, he was without vanity, he was careless of applause. (When he goes sun-bathing he does not mind in the least being snapped in his loin-cloth.) Perhaps that argues a sense of superiority. You may note anyhow in all he said and did, and says and does, the aristocratic frame of mind and habit of thought—a sensitive fastidiousness, a distaste for the rough-and-tumble of democracy, linked with the conviction that he could order the lives of the common people for them better than they could order them for themselves.

But Shaw thought of himself as a Puritan. Well, so he was, and is. When he wrote "*Widowers' Houses*" he had almost reached the point of regarding the urge of the flesh as merely disgusting. Having discovered the Life Force, he came to recognise physical passion as Useful to Eugenists, but I do not think that even now he would become dithyrambic over the jolly fun of conjugal relations. As for romantic love—well, that, he would say, is merely the urge of the flesh with Wardour Street trimmings.

You must remember that we knew Shaw as the Fabian propagandist long before we knew him as the Puritan playwright. And he was the best and most widely-read critic of the drama before he had a play on the boards.

When Shaw had "*The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*" produced for the first time, Frank Harris accused him of having plagiarised his, Harris's, play about Shakespeare. A silly accusation, as you will

realise if you take the trouble to read both plays. But I saw Harris about it—I was writing at the time for his *Vanity Fair*. And he told me how, when he was editing the *Saturday Review*, Shaw began to write about Shakespeare. "So," said Harris, "I said to G.B.S., 'You don't know anything about Shakespeare. I do. All the tortured passion of the man . . . et cetera, *ad lib.* . . . I'll write about Shakespeare, and you shall write about the drama. I'll give you six pounds a week'." The result of which was that Harris wrote his best book: "The man Shakespeare," and Shaw made the *Saturday* immortal with his dramatic criticisms.

I think that *he* has done nothing better. He is essentially the critic rather than the creator; and he was more at his ease criticising the drama than he was or has been since criticising life. Nevertheless, when you had allowed for his wit—the pen shod with lightning, as Filson Young said, and his fine judgment of acting, you found that his most valuable quality was his intolerance of plays without a purpose—plays which did not mirror life and come to a conclusion about it.

"Plays with a purpose" became a catchword, and dull affairs most of those plays with a purpose were. In fact, having vainly tried to work the Great Mango Trick with Henry Arthur Jones, Shaw determined to do the job himself.

I am shaky in my dates, and I don't remember when Shaw wrote "The Admirable Bashville," and when I created the part of Cashel Byron. "Bashville" is a burlesque blank-verse drama in five acts adapted from Shaw's early novel "Cashel Byron's Profession." Shaw wrote it in order to protect his performing rights. He says that he did it in blank-verse because he was in a hurry. I said the same when I delivered an address to the To-morrow Club, on the Decadence of the Arts, in blank-verse. In my case it was a lie.

Anyhow, "Bashville" is great fun, and certain members of the Pharos Club in Henrietta Street, myself among them, decided to play it. We did play it. Conal O'Riordan (Norreys Connel) produced us; and, as the Abbey Theatre people will tell you, he is a great producer. The late Cecil Chesterton was Mellish, Byron's trainer; Gerald Bishop was Bashville, Miss Zimmerman was Lydia, Miss Salom was Mrs. Byron, Cashel's mother. I remember that O'Riordan insisted that Miss Salom should obey the stage directions, and approach "like a wounded antelope." But she wouldn't. John Kirkby was the London Constabulary, and made up as Shaw. He was very like, only shorter, and black bearded. He used red ochre for the head and beard, and it came off at night on his pillow.

We had incidental music specially written on the Wagnerian leitmotiv plan, and when later the Stage Society revived "Bashville" their programme cruelly stated: "Incidental music omitted by special request."

Shaw never saw our show. It was to have been done in his presence at the house of a distinguished Fabian. But when the wife of the latter told us that the cast would take its refreshment apart from the guests, we struck, and our secretary had to cry off.

Of course Shaw did not resign from the *Saturday* as soon as he turned playwright. For years there was not a penny in his plays. The opinion of the late King Edward (he rushed out of the Avenue Theatre before the end of the first performance of "Arms and the Man," trampling on the manager) was the opinion of all the other managers. At the Avenue a man in the gallery cut through the applause with the word "*Rubbish!*" "I agree with you," replies Shaw from the stage, "but what are we among so many?" The point is: how many were there? Not enough to make "Arms and the Man" a success.

Shaw said good-bye to Harris and the *Saturday*

because trying to see every play put on the stage anywhere and speaking in public and writing plays and Fabian pamphlets as a recreation had almost killed him. He retired to be nursed back to health by Miss Payne-Townshend, who afterwards married him.

Before that happened, the theatre had taught him the value of conventions. He had always been trim, he had always disliked untidy Bohemianism, he had always revered the Rule of the Road as the first law of ethics. But early in his career as critic he was denied admission to a first-night because he was wearing a velvet jacket; before the end of it he wore conventional evening-dress as a normal act of good manners. During the process of his conversion I remember him apologising to the faithful for appearing before them in his "working clothes."

However, that was by no means his first use of evening dress. He tells us that in his early days as a London Irishman his only suit was a dress-suit. Compelled to lurk indoors until nightfall, he earned his keep of an evening by playing the piano in houses of the well-to-do.

Shaw is an accomplished musician, and was first known in London journalism as the musical critic of the *Star*. For him as for me, Mozart is the most seductive of composers, though he has the idea that Bach is the highest, and that he needs must love him —only he doesn't. Well, Shaw has always counted respect a far greater compliment than love.

Once, in Orage's *New Age*, Shaw told G. K. Chesterton that he, Shaw, could get far more finely drunk on "Don Giovanni" than G.K.C. could on beer. I should say that this is a fact, and it is significant. In the course of that same famous controversy—Wells, Belloc, and Arnold Bennett joined the mêlée—Shaw jested with G.K.C. on the subject of physical fitness, and instanced feats which he, G.B.S., could do "on his head." G.K.C.'s devastating reply was: "*In* your head!"

Music is the least human of the arts, the most completely divorced from the vulgar physical fact. It need not even be spiritual, it may be entirely abstract mentality—a luminous angle beating the void with ineffectual sides. But there is mentality on fire in Mozart; and, while I have never got drunk on music, though often on beer, I conceive that “*Don Giovanni*” would provide a far finer spiritual debauch than, let us say, the whining pornography of “*Tristan*.”

A fastidious mind like Shaw’s could not really approve of that luscious glutton, Wagner. I suggest that he occupied himself with Richard solely because the Bold Blubberer of Bayreuth was at that time something more than a demi-god of the English intellectuals and above all of the English Socialists. Shaw saw how he could use him, as he had used Ibsen. “*The Perfect Wagnerite*” is an excellent piece of special pleading, and it is a good example of what is called Shaw’s insincerity.

I don’t suppose that Shaw minded whether or no Wagner consciously meant what Shaw made him mean. Shaw’s moral, in which Shaw believed profoundly, was implicit in “*The Ring*”—that is, Shaw could read the moral into it. Well, the true believer can read his moral into anything—into Pear’s soap or the Binomial Theorem. Thanks be that there are limits, and that Shaw never wrote “*The Perfect Mozartian*.”

Shaw made Ibsen and Wagner Protestants and revolutionaries of his own peculiar persuasion. Usually your revolutionary, especially the one who makes revolutions, is a reactionary, as the name implies. The first Protestants desired a return to the simplicity of the “*Primitive Church*,” which was in fact the church of the conquering armies of Israel. The French revolutionaries, with Rousseau their master, looked back to the golden age when man lived, as all men are born, free. In every English revolt the aim was to get rid of the oppressor and re-establish justice.

But Shaw's Protestant champion was the Microbe of Progress which irritated the old original protoplasm so dreadfully that in the end it turned into William Shakespeare and G.B.S. This is the evolutionary theory, which is a possible explanation of how God made man, but is remarkably silly as an explanation of how man made society.

Well, let's say that it is an adaptation of the evolutionary theory! For Shaw is too logical to believe in the inevitability of gradualness. He saw that men, no less as societies than as individuals, make mistakes. So he decided that we proceed by trial and error, and thus slowly evolve from the jellyfish to the superman. In order to complete this quaint mystical theory Shaw has re-created God in his own (supposed) image, and reveals the astonishing fact that God Himself proceeds by trial and error, but apparently profits, finally, inevitably by His mistakes. I think Shaw's theory necessitates a God behind his Trial-and-error God Who will make things come right in the end. You will gather that this is so from the following conversation:

W.R.T. Do you believe in a God?

SHAW. Please read my preface to "Methuselah," and keep on reading it until you have got it precisely.

W.R.T. Do you think that the "a" is impertinent, and that "god" should have a capital letter?

SHAW. It would not be polite to write your name as titterton. Why then should John Morley have written God's name as god? God is correct monotheistically. Polytheistically a god is a god with a small "g".

W.R.T. Is your God a person?

SHAW. William Blake's "Old Nobodaddy" is a person. Only there is no such person. The Old Testament God is a person with body,

parts, and passions. The Church of England God has neither body, parts, nor passions, and therefore is not a person. Hence the contention of the late Rev. W. A. Murson that the Church of England doctrine is atheism.

W.R.T. Has God a purpose, a conscious purpose?  
SHAW. He *is* a purpose, and nothing else.

(I tried to conceive a purpose apart from a person, but could not.)

W.R.T. What are His attributes?

SHAW. That depends on the attributor. In so far as Carlyle was right in describing us as "mostly fools," God is a super-fool.

W.R.T. So you do not regard Him as all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving?

SHAW. Certainly not. When these attributes are achieved (except the last, which is romantic twaddle) the Great Purpose will be fulfilled and there will be nothing more to be done. But there is no need to worry about that at present.

W.R.T. How do you explain the existence of evil?

SHAW. Evil is simply the accumulation of the mistakes made by what you call God in His method of trial and error. Possibly one of the biggest of these mistakes was Man; so put your house in order, Titterton, or you may find yourself superseded one of these days.

W.R.T. I shall endeavour to profit by your admonition, though I have less fear of supersession than of the Judgment. However, it is not what I call God, but what you call God that we are talking about. Does your God progress?

SHAW. He tries to. He is doing His best, having nothing else to do.

W.R.T. He might loll. Is the world getting, if not

from day to day at least from age to age, better and better?

SHAW. "Better" begs the question. We are trying to evoke greater power over circumstances and greater understanding. But we have bad relapses, and may be beaten in the long run. If we are, serve us right!

W.R.T. Is the work of creation not over yet? Is "God rested on the seventh day" a prophecy?

SHAW. Not a prophecy, a fiction. Creation is a miracle of daily recurrence. "A miracle a minute" would not be a bad slogan for God.

"A miracle a minute" does not match very well with the conception of a Deity who is a "super-fool," tries His best to progress, proceeds by "trial and error," and has so accumulated His errors that what we call evil has resulted. But the "miracle a minute" may be the work, not of the Fabian-Progres-sivist God Whom Shaw rates so soundly, but of the Supreme Being Who has the Great Purpose which Shaw's Deputy-Governor and all His creation groan through trial-and-error to achieve.

As for the Deputy-Governor, I have the idea that He is in fact Shaw's Protestant champion, irritating the protoplasm, within and without him, into self-expression.

I have always regarded Shaw as a typical Anarchist and atheist who had his ideas muddled by his association with Sidney Webb and the Fabian Society. He has a passion for order and, especially, for tidiness, but he would prefer to keep himself tidy and in order. However, he hated to see untidy people round him, and so he fell in with Webb's scheme for ensuring order and tidiness.

Having sojourned with Nietzsche by the way, he

has ended with a belief in dictators, possibly working through a Fabian or a Bolshevik bureaucracy. The dictator is his old friend the Protestant champion, though, thanks to the Fabian infection, he has now and then a queer likeness to the Grand Inquisitor.

In the course of years he has come to believe firmly in the need for organisation to keep things tidy, and more vaguely in the need for a Supreme Being to make things tidy. But in himself he remains the Protestant champion, the lonely knight-errant, with no vows taken, tilting at all existing organisations and beliefs.

I am not aware that he has given us one creative idea, indeed he has acknowledged that he has spent much of his time following other men's ploughs—and he wasted his time. But he has always been a searching critic. One of his dramatic characters is nicknamed "The Devil's Disciple," and proves to be the best Christian in the play; and, if we must nick-name Shaw the Advocate of the Devil, we should remember that a functionary so entitled is an institution of the Catholic Church.

Shaw must be a lonely man. He demands respect, but rebuffs affection. He has no private life; there is a grille, but you can see through it. He is a rich man, but he has no treasured possessions. He is an Irishman, but he has no roots.

He has always demanded that men should be "public-minded." Property should be public, and the lives of men should be public property. To own something and cherish it is vicious; the family circle is a vicious circle. To love your home is romantic folly, to love your country is a crime.

Of course Frank Harris, that warm-hearted, hot-headed little sinner, could not understand Bernard Shaw. And the reaction of the public to Harris's revelations was entirely silly. Shaw is one of the most continent of men, but he has no secrets: he told Harris that the women who had granted him their

favours might be numbered on the fingers of one hand. And the town was shocked. He told Harris that he had been in his youth a typical Irish philanderer, flirting at large. And the town was appalled. Well, he is still a flirt, but it is quite obviously always summer-lightning.

Summer-lightning round this lonely, lively hermit on his mountain-top—so gay, so alert, so interested in things *and* people, so full of enthusiastic benevolence for his fellow-men, and so completely apart from them.

We dare not be sorry for him, since in his crowded life he has achieved far more than most of us have aimed at doing and have failed to do. We needs must admire him for his impregnable integrity, his inexhaustible devotion to the public cause.

Would he let us, we might feel for him a considerable amount of affection, for it is *he* that stands aloof. He is so large, so generous-hearted, so ready to help—though wisely he gives himself and not gold or silver. But the lonely knight-errant looks over the rim of his shield at all mankind—the face shaken with urbane though inextinguishable laughter.

## II

### G. K. CHESTERTON

HE is London's perambulatory monument. Wells skips, Shaw strides, but G.K.C. is Colossus out strolling yet always at rest. There he comes down Fleet Street. You mark him afar by his stature (yes, more by his stature than by his bulk). You mark him by his wide-brimmed low-crowned felt hat, his casual cloak that flaps in wing and skirt, his walking-stick that is a sword. You note as a curious fact that, though from time to time he pauses to give place to a lady, yet his way through the press of the Press is clear.

As he approaches, you see his big gentle boyish face with its warrior's moustache, and watch the skin round the eyes pucker, as he peers to right and left—half in blissful wonder, half in austere meditation.

Of all the crowd which parts before him, as the billows before a high-prowed ship, he is the only person quite at ease, at home. So he passes—regarding, relishing with the eyes of a child the miraculous commonplaces of shop and crowd and tumultuous carriageway. Scurrying foot-passengers hide him for a moment, and when next the vista clears he is gone.

Vanished into thin air? Not quite. That would be too stiff a miracle. In a haunt I know you shall find him anon, seated now, but no more and no less at ease.

Perhaps I shall be with him there—a little glass-topped table between us, and on it two glasses, mugs, or tankards of beer. That will be the extent of our potations, for G.K.C. drinks little, if ever he drank much.

The hat is off, and you see the amaranthine curls of

Jove crowning his jovial face. The eyes are switched inwards now, and see nothing but the thought. One hand plays conjuring tricks with the toppling pince-nez, or makes patterns with things on the table, the other addresses a thin but rapidly sprouting cheeroot to the fierce moustache.

And the great man talks—talks as he writes and as he walks, strolling through life and letters at home and at ease. Ever and again comes a flash of fun; the gay eyes beam at you, the face breaks into sunshine, and out comes an earthquake laugh that is a gurgle and a roar.

I am aware that the whole room has turned round to see and hear, but G.K.C. knows nothing of that. He goes on talking as though he and I were alone together on a mountain-top.

Suddenly, very suddenly, he becomes acutely conscious that we are in Time and Space, and have not, as he had felt, all eternity before us for our talk. There was an Appointment. He has the terrible inward suspicion that he may be late. He rises nervously, seizes his hat and stick and is himself again, beaming.

As he departs, not vanishing this time, but diminishing in perspective rhythmically until the glass-doors swing behind him, a man comes over to me and says: “Excuse me butting in, but that gentleman *was* Mr. Chesterton, *wasn’t* it?” I admit the impeachment. “Ah,” says the stranger, “you can’t mistake him. Wonderful man!”

Everybody knows the looks of G.K.C., and yet his photograph seldom appears in the Press, and every caricature of him that I have seen is a libel—no, not a libel: vulgar abuse.

They make him fat!

And that’s where the critics go wrong in estimating his genius: they don’t notice the stature of the man.

The first time I saw G.K.C. was at the Pharos Club. That was thirty-two years ago. The Boer War was on, and he had just become famous as the mouthpiece of some millions, perhaps the majority, of Englishmen who were opposed to the war.

I liked him for that. The Fabian Society, with Shaw at their head, had disgusted me by voting for the big battalions because they were big. And the All-Red comrades disgusted me equally with their Pacifist rant and their prayers for the defeat of my country. You can take their measure from this: a number of them were gathered together in one place on a Christmas Eve during the war, and on the invitation of Adolf Smith they wished silently and all together (with a heave ho, my hearties!) for the success of the Boers. That, in fact, was funny; but I was young.

Anyhow, it was meat and drink to me to find a man who loved war, but hated this war, who was ready to die for his country, but not to lie for her, and who was so strong a nationalist that he cursed the land he loved for murdering a nation at the behest of an international gang.

That was my ticket, that was my inspiration (apart from the joy of battle) when I fought mobs at Peace meetings and accumulated honourable scars.

But the rest of his doctrine baffled me. We young Socialists were out to destroy the Victorian era with all its musty conventions and establish freedom and justice upon earth. ("Ring out the old, ring in the new!") We knocked down the supporters of Capitalism-cum-Conformity easily enough, but here was a man who hated capitalism and yet applauded conventions riotously, as if it was jolly good fun to conform; here was a man who was all freedom and justice, was all for democracy and yet declared that Socialism was slavery. And he wasn't a fool like . . . well, like all the other anti-Socialists. He had wit and humour, logic and passion; he had, what was most to our mind, vision; he was eminently fair-minded, he acknow-

ledged all our premises, and he used those premises to confute us.

Of course we didn't acknowledge he had confuted us. We thought he was a great man gone wrong—except on the Boer War. "A great force running to waste at Battersea," as Shaw said of him when the war was over, and the Fabians had re-joined the revolution. The street hydrant simile might not attract us, but that was our idea.

It was his optimism that annoyed us. We revoltés were all of us branded with sorrow from our birth, and this man positively rollicked. He found it good to be alive. He walked down a London street, scheduled perhaps in a Socialist pamphlet, and found every shop, every lamp-post a fairy-tale.

Worst of all, he respected, nay had a fiery affection for the average sensual man, whom we as democrats regarded as our bitterest and most contemptible enemy. He exalted cabbies and carpenters and char-women and fishermen and farm-labourers, and was on pally terms even with small shop-keepers, farmers, and country squires. He visited the slum, not slumming, but hobnobbing, and found everything there admirable except the slum. If he had kept this sort of stuff for his poems, it wouldn't have been so bad; but he made it a fighting philosophy. Well, he made his poems a fighting philosophy.

And yet undoubtedly the man *was* a democrat, he *was* eager to establish the kingdom of God upon earth, he *was* a revolutionary. . . . He was an enigma.

That was not how I regarded him when I met him at the Pharos Club. For I shared one or two fanaticisms with the average sensual man. I was a fanatic for the English music-hall. I was a fanatic for English cricket, I was a fanatic for the English tavern, I was perhaps more of a fanatic for England than Chesterton, for he had the Catholic idea to balance his nationalism. (No, no, not yet! When I first met G.K.C. I was still trying to make my reasonable

nationalist faith square with my international formula.)

But here, anyhow, were points of contact. And there was another point of contact not so obvious : we had both been Walt Whitmaniacs ; but, whereas (in theory) I had remained on the Open Road, Chesterton had (in fact) found his home.

Yes, that was the strange equation : he had come home, and I hadn't ; though for me this earth was all, and he knew that here we have no abiding city.

But you may imagine that I regarded him with interest as I took the club lunch with him and tried to talk. Well, I listened to him, while he made patterns on the table-cloth with the cutlery. And he baffled me. His happiness baffled me. He, with his great jolly face, was so innocently blissful, and we of the club (except when we were playing bridge at ten-pence a hundred) were soldiers in the Army of the Night.

The next time I saw him—it was in the smaller club-room downstairs—he was drawing knights, griffins, unicorns, and other heraldic beasts in coloured chalks for a small child.

He came a good deal to our weekly club debates, which were notable. Joe Clayton, Conal O'Riordan, Edgar Jepson, Charles Charington, Janet Achurch, J. M. Robertson, Sam Hobson, Wherry Anderson, Amy Otter, John Kirkby, Louis McQuilland, Lord Russell, Haden Guest, and Cecil Chesterton, G.K.'s great little brother, made a fine team ; and the best speakers in town came to be shot at. But the joy of all was when G.K. and Cecil were both in presence, and both laughing. They laughed most when Hilaire Belloc from the back of the hall, with his topper in his hand and a happy insolent smile on his jaw, said what he thought of us. At the end of the proceedings Belloc would take the Chestertons away to recover in a pub.

I think G.K.C. left the club before (or when) Lord Russell's friends spoiled it by re-upholstering the

furniture and raising the subscription. I left it soon after, and retired in dudgeon to France, where I became an artist's model.

Some two years later I returned to London as a journalist writing for the *Daily News*.

To begin with, I wrote *leader-page articles*, and if I was published on a Saturday I found myself cheek-by-jowl with G.K.C. Naturally when I had read my own article, I read his. Soon I was reading everything he wrote, and the man began to tower; though even then I could not make out what he stood for. Of course I knew he stood for Catholicism, war, beer, and the common people; but I couldn't piece these things together, so as to account for that lamp in the topmost tower.

The office in Bouverie Street was full of stories of G.K.C. I heard that he had never asked to have his price raised, though his article doubled the daily circulation every Saturday. I heard that he went everywhere about Fleet Street in a cab, even, let us say, from the *Daily News* to El Vinos. I heard that he came every Friday to old Hawes who passed the accounts for payment, took the initialled scrap of paper, and cashed it. Perhaps it made him feel a working journalist and not a mere literary bloke.

One day, after I had joined the reporters' staff, Hawes told me of Chesterton's first meeting with young Cadbury. G.K.C. was just getting Hawes's signature when Cadbury hurried into the reporters' room where old Hawes sat. Seeing a stranger, and vaguely feeling that this stranger was after all heroic, he came to a full stop and beamed.

Hawes, somewhat surprised, made them known to each other.

"Really," said Cadbury, "I'm awfully glad to meet you, Mr. Chesterton. I do so admire your little articles."

G.K.C. bowed slightly, gurgled, and gave thanks.

"Now, tell me," Cadbury went on, "what is your

inspiration for your articles, and where do you write them?"

"Sir," said G.K.C., "I write them in the little pubs. of Fleet Street, and I write them on beer. And if that won't do I have some more beer."

Whereat little Cadbury, whose debauch is lemon squash, smiled bleakly, said: "Oh, really!" and fled.

One morning they told me in the reporters' room that Chesterton had just been there, and seeing somewhere a window that was very dirty, had written a "Ballade to a Dirty Window" on the window and in the dirt. I rushed down to arrange to have the pane cut out and preserved. But the window had been cleaned! Yes, cleaned! I can't help feeling that this was young Cadbury's doing. But I may be wrong.

The *News* sent me to interview Chesterton once or twice—once, I remember, at Overstrand Mansions, Battersea, and once at Beaconsfield.

Down at Beaconsfield we sat in his garden with wine beneath the bush, and talked of an attempt they were making just then to sweep away another fine old Kensington Square. I think they succeeded. Since G.K.C. was born in Kensington and his father lived there—his dear splendid mother lives there still—this roused him, as the trumpet rouses the war-horse that saith Ha! ha!

G.K.C. said Ha! ha! and a good deal besides; and as he was saying it a man, like an ass between two burdens, his mournful destiny in front and a sack of potatoes behind, opened the garden gate and staggered up to us. He *ordered arms* with the potatoes, saluted, and observed: "Sir, I'm an old soldier; I served in the Boer War. Will you kindly buy my potatoes?"

G.K.C. replied with that friendly graciousness he has for all men: "I'm delighted to hear that you have followed the noble profession of arms, though I regret you were forced to serve in that most unjust war. But I cannot buy your potatoes; it's as much as my

place is worth. If I were you, I should go round to the back door and see the quarter-master-sergeant."

The man saluted again, hoisted up his sack, and went away—nourishing, it was plain, the poorest opinion of my host's intelligence.

I got to know G.K.C. more intimately when I became a contributor to the *Eye Witness*. Which happened this way :

Having written for *P.I.P.*—one of Lord Camrose's earliest ventures—an article entitled "Is the *Daily Express* a German Spy," and succeeded in landing *P.I.P.* in a libel action (G.K.C. came to give evidence for me, and Tim Healey, our counsel, wouldn't call him) it was borne home to me that in future my work would not be in great demand on the *Daily News*.

So, as you always do in such circumstances, I determined to start a paper of my own—a weekly paper. I hooked a financier, and I began collecting my staff. Cecil Chesterton, whom I knew well, was to write my political notes for me. But my financier, whose address was in Copthall Avenue, vanished; and the paper, which was to have been called the *Red Herring*, never came out.

Shortly after that, the *Eye Witness* made its appearance, with Belloc and Cecil Chesterton as the editors. Charles Granville, who published the paper, afterwards told me that Belloc urged upon him the necessity for getting out before I did. But if Belloc says he did nothing of the kind, I shall believe him; though I like Charley, who is the only publisher that has ever treated me well.

Anyhow, I went along to the *Eye Witness* office, and Cecil came out and had a drink with me. But the question of my writing for the paper was not so easily answered. Did I share their point of view?

Having been put through a catechism, it appeared that I did share it on the subjects of music-halls, England, beer, and—to my surprise and Cecil's—freedom. So I joined the gang. I was sometimes in at the death

when the paper was put to bed—and often it seemed as if it would be the death-bed—and here and there G.K.C. would dawn upon me, blissfully in possession of the office or the bar.

It was then that I first knew him with his guard down. Happy and even reckless as he seemed with the whole world, the guard was always there. But among his bosom-friends, such as Hilary Belloc and Cecil (and one odd outsider like myself wouldn't matter) he frolicked like Man in his first innocence, he shouted like one of the young sons of God shouting for joy.

When the paper became the *New Witness*, with Cecil as sole editor, but J. K. Prothero (afterwards Mrs. Cecil) as his Lady Everything Else, I wrote more and more for it, finding myself sharing all its views, and, in the end, brought by those views to the threshold of a certain philosophy. I was very much one of the gang when Cecil went out to fight. G.K.C. became editor, and Mrs. Cecil was left in charge.

Cecil died at the Front just after the Armistice, a grievous loss to his friends, a heavy loss to England. I cannot write more about that.

Mrs. Cecil found herself unable, for the time, to carry on her work on Cecil's paper. She went away to Poland for a year, with commissions from newspapers to keep her going, and I carried on as G.K.C.'s assistant.

Then I came to know him well, so well that I am too near to get him in perspective, and must complete the portrait by giving you stray hints of what he did and said, and how he looked.

We will, if you please, telescope this period and that later one when I was his assistant-editor on *G.K.'s Weekly*.

I am sitting in the dingy office in Essex Street at the table that was Cecil's with Bunny the perfect editorial secretary, she tapping away like mad. The office is littered with papers—that is my fault, for

Bunny has a spring-cleaning once a week. The door opens, and, without warning from the outer office, the editor, huge but not formidable, fills the space.

He has the air of being about to apologise for having strayed in there by mistake, and then of finding to his surprise that it is his own office. Bunny bustles forward with eager devotion to take his hat, cloak, and stick; and to her he does apologise.

Having disengaged many, or few, typescripts and manuscripts of articles and poems from his pockets, he takes, under protest, the editorial chair which I have vacated, produces a cheroot from the usual cardboard-case, lights it, puffs furiously and thoughtfully, says: "Er, yes!" and tells us that he rather thought of doing this or that, if we didn't mind.

Sometimes it is editorial business, sometimes it is an interview that he has promised to give to an American journalist. Why must the interview be with an American? Because English journalists are content to buttonhole G.K.C. anywhere; but the citizens of the great republic demand to see Poet Chesterton at work in his dingy Fleet Street office, strewn with the offspring of his mighty mind.

The strange thing is that G.K.C. does not get too bored to see the fun of it, and during the hour or so that Bunny and I spend in the next room with Mr. Gander, the manager—who is deaf but eager, and loves cricket—we hear again and again G.K.C.'s mighty roar.

Sometimes, when G.K.C. arrives, the editorial room is so tidy it doesn't know itself. Not one stray MS. is on the table. On the beautiful bare rectangle of ink-stained and torn leatherette in its frame of mahogany there is nothing but pens, ink, and scribbling paper in *company-formation*. The room is, in fact, awaiting the formal gathering of the directors of a Company: G.K.'s Weekly, Ltd.

Soon they are seated round the spread board. At the head of it sits the Chairman, thoughtfully cheroot-

ing, and looking, without having a suspicion of it, tremendous. The truth is that he would like to run away.

On his right sits Alderman Cedric Chivers, manly, simple, and kind. Now and then his eyes smile down the table, but always they turn again to gaze with zealous reverence at the Chairman. Now and then he puts his hand to his ear to catch what they are saying. On G.K.C.'s left sits Mr. Thomson, solicitor, very quiet and business-like—the proxy of Lord Howard de Walden—determined not to give away what he thinks of the proceedings. Semi-detached from the table sits Maurice B. Reckitt, very vital and eager, but posing as negligent, and seeming to find the meeting an unpleasant necessity. But he will presently flame with the dry white heat of battle, and may be very biting indeed.

Next to Mr. Thomson is Mr. Gander the secretary, eager but deaf, surrounded with books and baskets of papers. Beside him is Bunny taking notes. I, like the papers and books, am present for reference only.

It is always the same picture: the Chairman thoughtful and embarrassed, Chivers burning with zeal, Reckitt disdainfully semi-detached but on the pounce, Thomson, absolutely still, looking at the table.

At every meeting the Chairman says: "God knows I'm the worst editor in the world." And the queer thing is that he means it. He has a colossal humility. He would never have taken over the editorship of the *New Witness* had not he believed that he owed it to his dead brother to do so. He founded *G.K.'s Weekly* solely in order to carry on the tradition. And from that moment he was full of fears of the "confounded mess" he was just about to make of the editing.

Does he feel the same about his literary work? Is that possible? Well, he seems to have no great opinion of his powers as a poet, and he has written stuff that will last as long as English.

After Mr. Gander has made his statement most of

the talking is done by Chivers and Reckitt. And all through the meeting, even while he is saying what a bad editor he is, G.K.C. is drawing on the fine new blotting-pad that has been provided for that purpose. He has certain obsessions—one is a knight in armour, bare-headed; but I shall not tell you of the others, lest some Freudian reader should use them (reversing the process of the ancient heathens) to discover what Chesterton has in his entrails.

They are fine drawings—well, you know his illustrations to E. C. Bentley's "Biography for Beginners," and Belloc's satirical romances.

The two things we carry away from the meeting (apart from the top sheet of the blotting-pad) are Alderman Chivers's anxiety that the editor may not overdo it, and M. B. Reckitt's conviction that there's no go in the damned paper.

Once a week Bunny, the editor, and I meet at the printers'. At first it was at Polsue's in Gough Square, overlooking Dr. Johnson's house. We had an affection for Polsue's, for they were the printers in Cecil's time, and it was handy for a final drink in Fleet Street when the issue had gone to bed. But for years the paper was turned out in Clerkenwell Close. I don't know how G.K.C. ever found his way there, but he did. Just as he strolled into his own office, so he strolled into this one, but here with the exuberant delight of a boy who has tracked the pirates to their lair. Yet he gave a sigh of relief at having found us, as he subsided gently into a chair, and immediately the office became grossly overcrowded.

Probably, before he looked at the page-proofs, he would say to Bunny, who had her typewriter with her: "I've just thought of a poem as I came along," or it might be: "I've just thought of a bit of doggerel." And then: "Would you mind me dictating it?"

When she looked up expectant from her machine, he would begin, seated or walking the quarter-deck of one pace on and one pace back, to deliver, fresh from

the mint, an immortal lyric, or an immortal skit. Bunny confessed that it always thrilled her. Well, it thrilled me.

Imagine the Tom Thumb of an office smelling of printer's ink, littered with proofs, crowded with Chesterton—the typewriter tapping, and the great cosy guttural voice rumbling out :

“ And that one head which turns the world in  
turning  
Moves yet as lightly as a random dove ! ”

Or imagine the voice breaking into chuckles at the fun of the skit, with a chorus from henchwoman and man of cacophonous laughter !

“ Yes, I think that's all,” he would say at length. Or else : “ I'll stop there, if you don't mind, and go out and survey the beauties of Clerkenwell.” Later on he would return with the rest of the poem and perhaps a book or two from the barrows of Farringdon Market.

It was a happy time ; I wish it could have gone on for ever.

G.K.C. is the President of a League, the Distributist League, the aim of which is to restore liberty by distributing ownership. Since I am a member myself, and I am not at the present preaching propaganda, I shall not explain what the hell it means.

We had one great night. You will remember the letter which Shaw sent to me to say that I was a donkey ! Well, in the course of it he stated that Distributism was plumb-centre Socialism, and that it was highly mischievous to set up a false antagonism between the two theories.

I told G.K.C., and suggested that Shaw (who loves the old man) might yield to a demand to justify his

statement. He did yield, and a debate was held at the Kingsway Hall on the question : " Do we agree ? " It was a notable battle, and listeners-in (it was broadcast) heard the noise of those without bursting in the doors.

Of course I think that Chesterton won. But you may decide the issue for yourself. The report of the debate has been published.

One passage of arms is worth recording here. Shaw had belittled the idea of private property. This weapon in his hand, he said, was his umbrella—at least, it was his wife's. It was his umbrella; but he wasn't at liberty to hit Chesterton over the head with it. Chesterton replied that Shaw seemed to forget that it was his, Chesterton's, head.

The League, or the London twig of it, meets every week in a pub., that was once a coffee-house, near the gates of the Temple. But when G.K.C. comes we have to move across the street to a larger hostel. We drink as we debate, and sometimes we sing. But we sing most and best at the annual dinner.

Never does G.K.C. look more glorious than when the dishes are cleared away and the choruses rise tumultuously. Then his eyes shine, his face glows, and from the amaranthine curls of Jove to the tempestuous waistcoat he beams and smiles and chuckles.

Great nights ! great nights ! long to be remembered ! I like to think that when we get to Paradise by way of Kensal Green we shall meet for feasts like these, with no sombre waiter to murmur : " Time ! "

But I trust that for many years yet we shall have the great old man down here in time and, comparatively, in space. And if we do, it will be owing mainly to the tender care of his wife, Frances Chesterton. But for her he would have died when he lost his brother. He was stricken to the heart, yet he lived.

He lives at Beaconsfield, in a house that he built bit by bit as he earned the money. He is out of the world's way, hidden apart, and only occasionally revisits the glimpses of the town. Yet I always think of

him, I always see him walking down Fleet Street, cleaving his way through the press, the cloak-tails flying, a Gulliver among the Lilliputs, yet the humblest of them all.

He sees, delights in, and gives thanks for the miraculous sights around him, knowing himself and all the rest of us the greatest miracles.

How does he put it?—

When all my days are ending  
And I have no song to sing,  
I think I shall not be too old  
To stare at everything;  
As I stared once at a nursery door  
Or a tall tree and a swing.

Wherein God's ponderous mercy hangs  
On all my sins and me,  
Because he does not take away  
The terror of the tree,  
And stones still shine along the road  
That are and cannot be.

Men grow too old to woo, my love,  
Men grow too old to wed:  
But I shall not grow too old to see  
Hung crazily overhead  
Incredible rafters when I wake  
And find I am not dead.

“ You have forgotten your childhood, Titterton. I haven't,” said Wells to me once. I think he is wrong in each particular. But we both stand abashed before Gilbert Chesterton, for G.K.C. is still a child.

A child! I hope you know what I mean. I hope you remember that our Lord said: “ A little child shall lead them.” If you do remember, you will under-

stand how it was that Chesterton told me what had been his greatest temptation.

It was not so long ago. I went down to Beaconsfield as an ordinary journalist interviewing an ordinary genius. And Gilbert wafted me into his familiar nook, and set wine upon the board in the old familiar way.

He was determined to help me if he could. But what was wanted? He did not want to take my editor as his father confessor. It would be irksome to put on sackcloth and parade down the columns of a newspaper with tears welling from his eyes and a lighted taper in his hands. But let us see what we could make of it!

What had been his greatest temptation? Well, he said :

“ Let me devote a few moments to a more or less humorous consideration of my murky past in order to discover if I have suffered any temptations which are conceivably of public interest !

“ Does it interest you to know that I was trained to be an artist and succumbed to a low passion for writing? Probably not. Besides, I am not quite sure which was the temptation, for in the eyes of a sane, commercially-minded person the practice of pictorial art and the practice of letters are equally low. Nor, indeed, have I ever entirely abandoned the *fantastic* habit of making funny faces—I mean apart from the funny face with which I am by nature endowed.

“ But I am known, if at all, as a man who has the still more fantastic habit of expressing opinion. And in that capacity I have suffered two major temptations, of which the second was the more dangerous.

“ The first was this : As a young man I was, superficially at least, altogether of my epoch. I saw many things that I thought damnable in modern English life—for example, I saw the poor oppressed and the usurer triumphant. And I heard other men like Shaw and Wells attacking those evils. So, without further examination, I ranked myself on their side. I called

myself a Socialist, and I was anyhow a Progressive. The present was dreadful, but with the help of the idealists we were to grow every day in every way a little better and better—or perhaps a lot better all at once.

“But I suppose that I was only a Progressive on the outside. I suppose that inside I always wanted things quite different from what the real Progressives wanted. For I grew uneasily conscious that some of the things that they wanted most to destroy were those which I wanted most to preserve. Little things, neighbourly things.

“*There* was the temptation. I might stifle my doubts and march forward in the United Progressive Army, or fall out of the ranks and march off by myself. Yes, you can put it that way, though, in fact, I realised the temptation only when it was overcome.

“It came to me in a flash when I was walking down a certain street in Notting Hill. There was a row of shops. At one end was a public-house, somewhere or other at the farther end I rather think there was a church. And on the way there was a grocer’s, there was a second-hand bookshop, there was an old curiosity shop where they sold, among other things, arms—there were, in fact, shops supplying all the spiritual and bodily needs of man.

“And all at once I realised how completely lost this bit of Notting Hill was in the modern world. It was asked to be interested in the endowment of a public library in Kamchatka by an American millionaire, or a war between an oil trust and another oil trust in Papua, or the splendid merger of all the grocery interests in Europe and America, or the struggle between the brewers and the Prohibitionists to give us worse beer or less beer.

“In all these world-shaking events this little bit of Notting Hill was of no account. And that seemed to me idiotic. For to this bit of Notting Hill the bit was of supreme account.

“In the same instant I saw that my Progressive friends were more bent than any to destroy Notting Hill. Shaw and Wells and the rest of them were interested only in world-shaking and world-making events. When they said “every day in every way better and better,” they meant every day bigger and bigger—and *in every way*.

“Now, in nature there is nothing like this continual expansion, except growth, which ends when the creature reaches maturity. And though—somewhat unjustly as I think—I may be cited as a case to the contrary, the creature does not expand equally in all directions.

“I saw that these Progressives were obsessed with the idea of dilation. There is such a thing as a dilated heart, which I am told is a disease. There is such a thing as a dilated, or swelled, head, which I gather is a misfortune. But the typical case of a creature who dilated equally all round is that of the imperially-minded frog, who wanted to be a bull, and dilated until he burst.

“In that half-second of time, gazing with rapt admiration at the row of small shops, nobly flanked by a small pub. and a small church, I discovered that, not only was I against the plutocrats, I was against the idealists. In the comparatively crystalline air of that romantic village I heard the clear call of a trumpet. And, once and for all, I drew my sword—purchased in the old-curiosity shop—in defence of Notting Hill.

“But the second temptation was the staggerer. You may remember that in my early poems and essays I attempted a defence of creation on the following lines. There were a lot of people who offered up thanks for everything—for night and day, the four seasons, the solar system, the Forth Bridge, the game of cricket, trousers, Farmer Giles, and Mr. Selfridge, hansom-cabs, and taxis—everything.

“Well, I soon saw that as a working-philosophy this wouldn’t do. The gentlemen who propounded it

seemed to be unaware of the existence of such a thing as the toothache.

“No, the true defence and justification was in *anything*. That we had, so miraculously, anything; that we were, so miraculously, alive; for this I thanked God and glorified Him in His works.

“I have not shifted from this position. It is the truth. But it is, I discovered later, not the whole of the truth.

“Not very long after I had set up in business as a philosopher on these desirable but limited premises came the second and greater temptation. A very charming lady told me: ‘You have a following.’ She said it impressively. It was the promise of an ever larger and larger following. She said, too: ‘You are an optimist, and that is so refreshing after all this pessimism.’

“She came to me later when I had resisted and overcome the temptation, and said: ‘You are losing your following.’ She was sad about it. But I was glad.

“Of course, you see what the temptation was: to become a heresiarch, the head of a new little universal religion. I don’t know that the temptation lasted long when once I had discovered that I was in fact preaching a heresy.

“Heresy, you must remember, is not a lie; it is a truth isolated from all the other truths. And I discovered that my praise of Anything taken alone was a good excuse for the tyrant, the oppressor of the poor, and other detestable Things-as-they-are. I adjured my heresy—that is, I recovered my balance; and I lost my following.

“There was a good example of a heresy in the interview with the Aga Khan published in the *Sunday Graphic* some weeks back. His Highness was reported to have said that if a wall fell and crushed his foot, he would exclaim: ‘That is the best thing that could have happened to me.’

“I feel inclined to retort: Then the Persian

language must be singularly deficient in expletives. But you observe what's the matter with the Aga Khan: he suffers from my old complaint. He praises Anything, and ignores the balancing truths which complete the splendid paradox of existence. He says: 'Thy will be done!' but not 'Deliver us from evil.' This is God's universe all right, say we. . . . But there is the Enemy.

"This, then, was my great temptation. I might now be an established heresiarch, like Mr. Bernard Shaw, or Mr. H. G. Wells, or Mr. Aldous Huxley, interpreting the universe in terms of the little bit of truth which happened to appeal to me personally. No, I don't think I should have been as interesting a heresiarch as Mr. Shaw, for he with his tremendous intellectual honesty and agility has skipped from heresy to heresy, as he found by trial and error that they didn't work.

"But I should have been a heresiarch, let us say, of proportions. And I should have had my following. Any old heresiarch can get a following large enough to fill a small hall, and make him fancy that he has a clientele as universal as a champion jockey's. But I rather think I should have done better than that. I rather think I should have made quite a sensation.

"I was frightened of two things: First of all of my heresy, which was so dangerous, because it was so true. And secondly of my followers. I was proud of them. If I could have taken them about with me in procession we should have made a pretty show. But they frightened me. I saw what Shaw's followers—nimbly as he dodged them—had done to him. So, as I am not an expert dodger, I persuaded my followers to drop me. I dropped, very softly, on a rock."

On that rock I will leave him. You may think it is not much of a rock. But anyhow it is strong enough to hold with ease the tremendous bulk of Gilbert Chesterton.

### III

#### MARIE TEMPEST

WHEN I was young, young Marie Tempest was a star, *the star*, of musical comedy. There was nobody like her. There were heroines who were serious and sentimental, there were soubrettes, there was Connie Edis. But Marie in her varying moods and tenses gave us everything. And yet, touching every note, playing upon every emotion grave or gay, defiant and reckless as she might be in her madder flights, she was always a queen, worshipful.

She was young; breathlessly, lyrically young, yet she was a woman. There was never with her that hint of the crude, the immature which to-day they dub *flapperish*, and, by the powers, find fascinating. It was plain that she had sprung all-armed from the brain of Jove—or perhaps of Apollo. She was a woman, and she was utterly lovable, but we should have hit the man and snubbed the woman who suggested that she was brim full of sex.

I first rubbed shoulders with her, or might have rubbed shoulders had I dared—and then I wager no powder would have come off on my sleeve, for she had (and has) the complexion of a child—I first stood near her, let us say, at a Stage Society show.

It was in that first jolly season when they set out to discover all the great unacted English dramatists, and succeeded only in discovering Bernard Shaw. The audience was a mixture of quite respectable actors and actresses, fairly respectable Fabians, and long-haired highbrows—of whom I made one, though I wore my long hair as a beard.

In the intervals people circulated and talked, after the manner of Continental playgoers. During one interval I found myself on a staircase looking up at Marie Tempest.

An impudent Irish face, saucy eyes and lips, brilliant hair tugged hard back from a fine forehead, and that quite dazzling complexion.

The face was saucy, yet comically demure. The primly pursed lips bottled up the jest that the dimples were laughing at. And I had the shocking suspicion that I and my beard—though she looked away from us—were part of the jest.

I noted with surprise that the lady was short, and immediately forgot it, for she was the only creature worth looking at on the stair. She held herself erect and secluded with dignified yet ironical precision. Her tripping paces down the stairway were like steps in a minuet. To my greater surprise nobody cried : “*Vive la reine!*” —but of course Shaw was the king of the Stage Society.

Then a cloud came between us. It was an actor. He said : “Oh, Marie, I want to introduce . . .” I forget who it was, and anyhow I shouldn’t tell you. But I saw, when the actor gave place and waved his hand, that the debutant was long-haired and soulful.

The debutant yearned forward. Marie beamed and bobbed. “Do we kiss?” she asked innocently.

I think that was in 1906, the year that saw the star, dancing for fresh worlds to conquer, shine over a new world.

We who loved her were sad when she abandoned the musical stage for straight comedy. For she had a dear, delightful singing voice in exquisite control. But the queen could do no wrong; so we followed her.

And perhaps she was more charming in her new rôle than she had been in her old one. For fourteen

years she shone unrivalled. Then in 1914 we lost her, I feared for ever.

But she came back to England in 1922, and I felt rekindle all my youthful fires. In fact I serenaded her in a rapturous sonnet—published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, a journal afterwards sold by Sir John Leigh to the *Evening Standard* for scrapping.

Yet it seemed at first that the post-war young things would not take to Marie. She had been absent for eight swift-changing years, and some of the young fools said that she was old-fashioned.

It took her a year or two to conquer them, and I helped her to conquer. For it was at the Ambassadors, at first in "The Torchbearers," and then more emphatically in "Hay Fever" that she showed how modern is an immortal. And I was the Press agent there.

To gain publicity for Marie was a labour of love. For at each rehearsal I became more familiar with those fine manners, that finesse, that wit, that civilisation which we owe to women, and which the modern world is trying so diligently to lose.

I admit that occasionally the great little lady had tantrums—what great queen has them not?—and then, if you could, you fled, if you could not you knelt for pardon.

And you got it. Oh, yes. Did you show but a touch of esprit and gallant devotion, the tantrums vanished, and her Majesty chirped, patted your arm—with a fan, you felt it was—and forgave you.

If she allowed you to flirt with her that paid for all. Flirting is a forgotten art, perhaps it went out with ruffles, certainly it is impossible without a code of manners and morals. In the perfect flirtation there must be one thread of reality—the lady must be honestly admired: that gives a playful tenderness to all the mocking makebelieve.

But how do you account for this?—At a *photo-call*, my wife being present and on the stage, Miss Tem-

pest, beckoning me to her, took my arm and walked with me to and fro, talking in low tones about nothing.

You flirt the more securely when you are the daily witness of my lady's utter devotion to another. And Marie Tempest was, and is, utterly devoted to her husband, William Graham Browne. And he to her.

Graham Browne is Miss Tempest's producer, and rehearsals are trying affairs, especially of a morning when tempers are short. (Walter Hackett once assured me that he and his wife Marion Lorne never quarrelled, except at rehearsals.) Yet she who I am sure would have jumped off the stage and beat Basil Dean about the head with his own megaphone, was as docile, almost, as an understudy when rehearsed by Willie.

Well, of course, Willie has an Irish sense of humour, and that counts for a deal.

I have caught a stray glimpse of the life in their gracious home in St. John's Wood, and I imagine that half of it is laughter.

But to know Miss Tempest well you must not be employed by her. Business details worry her, however much Willie may strive to come between her and them, for she is all compact of courage, and will not shirk the things she hates. In the theatre she is only entirely herself when she is facing her public on the stage. And then she is somebody else.

But come with me to her little dainty house in Avenue Road, with its glimpse from the front sitting-room through the house to the fair back-garden, and you shall know Marie Tempest indeed.

Here she comes floating into the room, a gracious presence, roguish and queenly, smiling and demure. She is not young, you tell yourself, counting the years, yet you cannot believe it. She is a fresh young flower that has just tripped in from the garden.

“ Well, Chaldean reporter,” she says, “ what do you mean by this? ”

W.R.T. "By coming to see you? Ah, you know!"

MARIE. "Rubbish!" Yet she chirps.

W.R.T. "The ostensible purpose of my visit, dear lady, is to inquire what I mean, but far more what you mean, and what we all mean by it."

MARIE. "By what?"

W.R.T. "Oh, by everything. By being and doing and loving and living and dying."

MARIE (*lightly tapping my arm*). "That, my friend, is a question that has baffled the finest intellects since the dawn of civilisation."

W.R.T. "When was that?"

MARIE. "I don't know. But it is the riddle of the Sphynx."

W.R.T. "I agree. But I trust that you will be more vocal than the Egyptian pioneer of the silent film."

MARIE (*with a little screech*). "I trust that I resemble that broken-nosed lady in no particular."

W.R.T. "Perish the thought! Except in the one particular of sticking to a point."

MARIE. "In a desert. Which we are doing perfectly."

(I looked round the *desert* with a smile.)

MARIE. "But why come to me?"

W.R.T. "Apart from the obvious reason, at which you will not allow me to hint, I come to you because you have seen more of life than most of the professors who argue through the centuries about Life, and lived more than all the poets."

MARIE. "No, no! The poets live intensely. Intensely. But I admit that your question creeps into my mind whenever I see something beautiful. Why should spring flowers always bring tears to my eyes? It is not only association. I had the feeling when I was so young as to have almost no memories."

"Almost no memories!" she repeated slowly, with her eyes on the garden-vista.

W.R.T. "Trailing clouds of glory do we come . . ."

MARIE. "Perhaps! Anyhow, looking at a daffodil one day I said: 'Surely that is the reply to all the atheists. How could such a lovely thing be if there were only a blind force driving the planets in their course?'"

W.R.T. "You know the Darwinian reply."

MARIE. "I do. I did. But it didn't fit in with my mood. And my mood was evidence as good as any observable phenomenon."

W.R.T. "I agree."

MARIE. "Physical science does give a more or less reasonable account of how we arrive at what we are. But so far as I know it has no answer to your question. I contend that I got nearly to the truth when I questioned the daffodil."

W.R.T. "And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils."

MARIE. "That's it. However, I confess that I can't put the answer in a phrase. Yet, being here, what things there are to delight us!

"Beauty in form, and colour, and sound! Poetry; great prose! Joy in the mere exercise of our senses, joy in the mere exercise of our functions! What splendid ripping fun it is merely to be alive!"

W.R.T. "There is a scientific explanation of some of this."

MARIE. "I know. But somehow it isn't quite enough. Bishop Barnes may prove that there is no place for magic in religion. He can neither disprove nor explain the magic of this resplendent world."

W.R.T. "Is that not enough, then? Here are delights! We are here to enjoy them."

MARIE. "No! no! no! That way madness, or, what

is worse, boredom, lies. All this beauty, all the joy in being alive, makes us ask the more urgently why it was given us, and why if we merely seek the satisfaction of our senses all joy eludes us."

W.R.T. "I suppose we feel we're cheating the gods."

MARIE. "Perhaps that's it. It is certain anyhow that pleasure, spiritual or physical or both, taken neat, first weakens all our fibre, and then revolts us.

"No, my friend, work, work, work—that is the true mainspring of existence."

W.R.T. "Behold the lilies of the field. They toil not . . ."

MARIE. "My dear Chaldean, I refuse to be a lily, even of the field, and certainly not an arum. No, man—and man, as you may remember, embraces woman—man demands effort, conflict. We get the final satisfaction of life only by using ourselves up to the last ounce of the last talent."

W.R.T. "So you have answered the riddle."

MARIE. "I have merely re-stated it. For, why should we do it? I don't know. But I do know that when you have done your day's work, or your week's, or your month's, or your year's, or your life's work, then in your half-holiday all the delights of the earth are yours."

W.R.T. "So beauty is a by-product."

MARIE. "Beauty is an ornament, a luxury, an extra, a toffee for good children. Women come to me and say they get nothing out of life—how can they find happiness?"

W.R.T. "That very blue bird!"

MARIE. "The Great Auk, my friend. And I ask them why the devil should they be happy. Let them work—there's plenty of work to

do—and they'll get something better than happiness.

“ And at the end of the shift or the job they'll get their half-holiday and then the draught of pleasure which has seemed like the leavings of last night's champagne will taste like the wine of Paradise.”

W.R.T. “ The wine they drink in Paradise was brewed in High Lorraine.”

MARIE. “ Really? I thought it was a trade secret.”

W.R.T. “ But will any work do? You give joy to thousands.”

MARIE. “ Well, from the letters I get I believe I do.”

W.R.T. “ But take a stockbroker—or a burglar! ”

MARIE. “ I refuse to do so. My only answer to that is that a man who can make a success of one sort of work could make a success of another. But I am not built to be a judge of other people.”

(At this moment, her husband, *Graham Browne*, entered the room.)

“ What dreadful questions have you been asking my wife? ” he said.

W.R.T. “ I have been asking her what we are here for.”

(He gave me a veiled glance of playful mockery. Then he turned to Miss Tempest.)

“ Mary, ” he said, “ shall we tell him the story about the anthropoid tree-dweller? ”

(Miss Tempest agreed that they should, though I am of opinion that he then and there proceeded to invent it.)

GRAHAM BROWNE. “ Well, in the days when our remote ancestors lived in trees, a young thing said to its mother who was busy catching something: ‘ Mother, what are we here for? ’

“ In the spiritual agitation of the moment, the young thing let go the bough to which he was

anchored, fell some considerable distance, and perished.

“Peering after the careless child, the mother replied: ‘To hold on, you fool!’—thus having achieved an epigram, and got rid of a superfluous offspring at the same time.

“Can you work that into the interview?” said Graham Browne.

The next time I went to see her I was asked to breakfast. And I arrived late. I found her capped and booted for the road, and terrifying.

I had my excuse. But I did not offer it. How could I offer an excuse to offended majesty? Yet all she said was: “You’re late,” very quietly, but with the glance of Doom.

So I sank in the pile of the carpet at her feet, took her hand, and begged forgiveness.

“Just like So-and-so, isn’t he?” she said to Graham Browne, gave me a gentle push, and in that fascinating little bark of hers told me to get up, and come to breakfast.

And there I told her how I had won my wife by failing to keep a tea-appointment.

“Then she deserved her fate, poor thing,” said Marie Tempest.

What we talked about over breakfast I can’t quite remember, but I think it was about God. I know that I rode with her in her car to the theatre, and had a much more interesting talk about her.

She’s so astonishingly alive and contemporary. With her relish for fine manners—she will insist that they are more important than morals—you would think that she would have no patience for the young people of the day. But, no! They delight her. The courage and directness of them, their buoyant health and high spirits.

Cases of rank bad manners she mentions with a

scorching comment. But these, she will tell you, are exceptions; and there were hoydens when she was young.

Well, it is their youth she is drawn to—she who is herself the youngest grandmother alive.

A grandmother! Perhaps it was the recollection of this inconceivable fact that led me to ask her the other day what she would write in her last will and testament.

“Sir,” she said, “you flatter me.” An ironic dimple contradicted the demureness of her composure.

“I shall not have a last will and testament, for I shall have nothing to leave behind.”

W.R.T. (*sentimentally*). “Nothing?”

MARIE (*misunderstanding wilfully*). “Nothing. And you must not ask me why this is so. That is a secret, shared to some extent I admit with the tax-collector.”

W.R.T. “And to think . . .”

MARIE. “Still less must you pity me. Life gives me a great deal, and I ask no more from it. I regret nothing, not even that, unlike a writer or a painter, my work vanishes when the curtain rings down. I have my hour.”

W.R.T. “And as long as the hour lasts it is eternity.”

MARIE. “Yes! And indeed the actor, the singer, the dancer keep an eternal youth. Old masters grow out of heel. All but all the books get wrinkled within a lustre. But Siddons is for ever the Siddons of her prime.”

W.R.T. “Talk not to me of your Siddonses when I’ve seen . . .”

MARIE. “Indeed I should not. Of course I do not compare myself with her. But we share the same everlasting mercy. The best thing I shall leave behind me will be tender memories in the hearts of the public that have loved me.”

W.R.T. "And whom you have loved."

MARIE (*looking at me critically*). "Yes, as a noun of multitude. But indeed I love them, I shall remember them in my will, and kiss hands to them from my safe seclusion.

"Having nothing but such imponderable legacies to bestow, the subject of a last will and testament has not exercised my mind. But if I had—let me be lavish—half a million, I think I should leave it all to my husband, William Graham Browne, with the proviso that he looked after my son. That would be the perfect arrangement."

W.R.T. "And if . . ."

MARIE. "My husband predeceased me? The whole lot would go to my son."

W.R.T. "On conditions?"

MARIE. "No! Almost certainly without restriction. What right have I to dictate how my son shall behave? When he was a child I devoted every care to his upbringing. I gave him the chance to understand life; I taught him to use his own judgment. Why should I in my last will seek—from my safe and cowardly seclusion—to hold his mature judgment in fetters?"

W.R.T. "Well, it would be your own money, and he's your own son."

MARIE. "It appears to me to be no more reasonable than generous to buy a certain course of future action on account of the conditions of the moment. Conditions change, and the wisdom of to-day may be the oppressive folly of to-morrow.

"Moreover, while I am here I should never dream of trying to bribe my son to act against his judgment. It would be mean to work the dodge by mixing sentiment with cash in my testament.

“ I am fond of possessions, but I realise their tyranny. Possessions are to use and use up, not to hoard. And my possessions, few and fragile that they are, belong to my hour. If, like the young man in the Bible, I had great possessions, I would far rather disperse them than that anyone should suffer from them later on.

“ Young people sometimes dream what they would do if they had wealth. But if great wealth came to them they might cease even to dream. Without the wealth the dream might be translated into action.

“ It would seem, then, that though, I trust, fairly human, I am quite unsentimental.

“ I have very definite views about my grandchildren. Of course I have. I know precisely how I would have them grow up. But I have equally definite views about the folly, I might almost say the wickedness, of trying to interfere with their liberty of action.

“ I shall abstain even from advice—and still more from comment—not so much for fear that my words would be disregarded as for fear that my advice might be followed, my commands obeyed.”

W.R.T. “ And what will you say to your servants? ”

MARIE. “ I shall say nothing. Except to thank them for their care of me. Advice to them would be even more absurd than advice to one’s descendants. They would have every right to say, though I should not hear them, ‘ Mind your own business,’ though I should have done with business then.

“ Much the same applies to—*les affairs*. I have my own ideas on public affairs and how they are tending. It seems to me that I have felt the tremor of earthquake and seen the structure of society quiver. But

who am I that I should tell society what it is to do to save itself?

“ For one thing, I don’t know.

“ I think the major part of my testament would be a hymn of thankfulness for the glory and beauty of the world.

“ For its dawns and sunsets, for the gracious shapes of men and women and children, for the scent of a rose, for the breath of the west wind, and for all sweet sounds.

“ I would give thanks for great art. I would give thanks for fine manners—the manners that make the man, manners that spring from consideration for others and serene harmony of soul. Good manners are so delightful, bad manners are so distressful that I can unfeignedly give thanks for the many finely-mannered men and women I have known.

“ To my mind, order and beauty go together, and they have written their signatures all over this splendid world.”

W.R.T. “ Then *that* is your testament? ”

MARIE. “ Yes! But to my public, my own especial public, I shall say a word. We have been together for a long while now, and we have been good friends. They have given me great happiness, and I think I have given them some. For, indeed, it is the thought of giving happiness—and getting it in the giving—that sustains one. I trust it will be long before I say it, but there it will be: ‘ Hail and farewell, you who were so much a part of myself, whose thoughts and feelings pulsed with mine. Marie Tempest gave you the best of herself—without stint. And you gave her your hearts and hands. Do not forget her when she has spoken this, her

epilogue, before a lowered curtain.' Perhaps, after all, this epilogue, this farewell, is the true testament of Marie Tempest.

"And to my husband I shall say—— No, no, my friend! I shall not put that into my testament. Besides, he is listening."

"I will tell you all about that," said Graham Browne, "while you put your coat on."

"But you are not to believe him," said Marie Tempest, as I bent over her hand.

## IV

### H. G. WELLS

ONCE, returning a script to me, G.B.S. wrote : "When you are headlining this remember that I am professionally Bernard Shaw in two words. I particularly dislike being Georged." But the fact is that he is Georged, and that he likes being Bernarded. Far distant are the days when he was always G.B.S. Whereas Mr. Wells is never thought of as Herbert George. He does not hide his Christian name, as Arnold Bennett hid his Enoch. Simply it has never occurred to anybody to call him Herbert, much less Bertie. I am of opinion that even in the domestic circle he was known by his initials. Well, I glanced in once or twice at his domestic circle, and I have no recollection of the passage of Christian names.

This might be regarded as extraordinary, since Wells is a very friendly fellow, entirely without social aids or literary pomposity, did you not remember that he is a very typical Englishman of the lower middle-class—like myself—and that we hate to have folk make free with our Christian names. Also we hate nick-names. We like to be known as H. G. Wells or W. R. Titterton. It is not stand-offishness, it is not precisely shyness. I think it a sort of spiritual chastity. Which is strange to reflect upon when considered in connection with the ethical opinions of H. G. Wells. But then I have always believed that those same opinions, which elevate incontinence into a virtue, are not native to the man.

I first met H.G. when he lived in Church Row, Hampstead. The *Daily News* sent me to get his

views on apprenticeship and the advisability of working for its revival. It was a queer business that abortive campaign. The Lord Mayor—Knill was his name—began it. To signalise his moving into office, he said that he would like to revive apprenticeship. And all the members of the City Companies present said : “Hear, hear,” and thought no more about it.

But for certain reasons the idea interested me. So I told the News Editor of the *Daily News* that I knew the authority on apprenticeship, and could get an interview out of him. I was sent.

It was my pal A. J. Penty, whose books on the Guild system contain more thought to the square inch than all the works of Adam Smith, Cole, and Laski to the square mile. I interviewed him in his lodging while he shaved and almost cut himself laughing at the idea of being interviewed for the Press.

But the *copy* was liked so well that the *Daily News* gave a column to it, and I was sent out the next day to see Sir Charles Dilke. He, a tired old man, was profoundly uninterested, but of course his name counted. Then I saw Walter Crane, a fine figure of the dedicated artist-craftsman (embalmed). The next subjects were the Webbs, who frightened me to death by pointing out what had happened in 1342 and 1587 and 1694 and 1715 and 1863 and so on. Sir Michael Sadler wired from the North asking if he might come to London to be interviewed. Last of all, I was told to see H. G. Wells.

I am going on to tell you how I saw him. But I shall first of all reveal what happened to my campaign. It had assumed such proportions that the Lord Mayor had Penty down to the City to address the Liveries or something. And I fancied that we were really going to rouse England—or anyhow Cheapside. And then one day when I went in to the News Editor with a new name, he said : “Oh, we’ve had enough of that,” and sent me off to interview a menagerie. That was journalism, that is.

However, I went to Church Row to call on Wells, not expecting to get much out of him, for he does not suffer reporters gladly.

But I was shown in at once, and he made friends with me at once. Reporters, said he, were *de trop* in Church Row; but I was a fellow-citizen of the Republic.

You can imagine how the young journalist—journalist by trade, though poet by profession—blushed. It was a charming compliment from the Great Known to the Little Unknown; for H.G. meant the Republic of Letters. There was some talk of that republic in those days before most literary men became autonomous suburbs.

H.G. said that we should have to take our interview perpendicularly, for he had an appointment at the Savage, and he always walked down to town for the good of his health. We walked down—at a terrific pace, Wells chatting pleasantly all the while, and I trying to catch my breath for the necessary interruptions.

He was alive to all the sights and sounds of Haverstock Hill, Chalk Farm, Camden Town, and so on, as well as to the subject of our debate. He bubbled with satisfaction at being alive and finding so many things to be curious about. It was an exhilarating experience, though a little too like that of his own creatures who sampled the Accelerator.

Did Wells take me into the Savage and stand me a drink? I can't remember; no doubt he can. Anyhow, before or after we got there the vision of Bart Kennedy, beaming and garrulous, came before us. And Wells told me how he had had the mad idea that Bart Kennedy and Joseph Conrad being sailors both would like to know each other, and how when he made the introduction, Conrad, the officer, stared stonily at Kennedy, and Kennedy, the fo'c'sle hand, glared sulkily at Conrad, neither of them with a word to say. Of course it was a typical Wellsian generalisation.

After that Wells had me to his house to dine with Saintsbury and Robert Ross. But all I remember of the conversation is that Wells said: "It is expedient that one man die for the people," and Ross said: "That's the best of you, Wells, you're so finely logical."

And then Wells gave us a tune on the pianola.

I don't know how often I went to see H.G. at Church Row. I remember sitting talking with him, and wondering whether he looked more like a cherub or an engineer. And I think it was on this occasion that he denied having drawn my portrait as Mr. Polly. It was clear that he hadn't as high an opinion of Mr. Polly as I had.

The best time I had with him was at a Christmas party. Among other children there were H. W. Nevinson, Robert Radford—a great dreamy fellow of a poet, as he would have called himself—and H.G. We played charades. In one scene H.W., spare and soldierly, was a foreign station-master mouthing monstrous names. It seems to me now that in every scene Wells was a small boy with his trouser-legs rolled up to show his suspenders. Everybody was happy, but H.G. rollicked. You remember his story of the man who lost weight? Well, I was surprised that Wells didn't bounce up to the ceiling.

I did not go many times to Church Row, but Wells's personality is so strong that I seem in retrospect to have been a frequent guest. He is a marvellous talker, especially when he forgets his logic and remembers his imagination. I liked to sit and hear him dream.

He told me once that his story of the "Door in the Wall" is a record of a real imaginative experience. He often passed the door when he was young, but never opened it and went in. Years later he passed that way again, remembered the door, and determined to open it. . . . But the door was gone.

Shortly after this talk I went world-wandering.

When I came back to Hampstead, Wells had moved, and so I lost him. Occasionally in the years between he hustled, tripped, or chirruped into the theatre of a first-night, greeted me in friendly fashion, and regarded me quizzically with his bright bird's eye. But since 1914 he was merely news in the papers and books to be reviewed. Until I met him again in 1930.

But I had lost sight of him in more ways than one. The Wells I knew and liked was the imaginative Wells—the writer, on the one hand, of those tales of magic, and, on the other hand, of those tales of the Little Man. There had been the other Wells, who chopped logic, but I had not minded him. The real H.G. was this story-teller, this immortal. Well, the stories *are* immortal, but early in the War I realised that the story-teller was no more.

Of course I should have known some time before this that the maker of Mr. Kipps and Mr. Polly was dead and done for, since I had seen him embalmed in the "New Machiavelli," and pieces of the mummy used in feeble incantation in "Marriage" and "The Passionate Friends." But I had regarded these as temporary aberrations, fragments of inverted biography, the letting-off of steam through a safety-valve.

Strange to say, I think it was "Bealby" convinced me that the old story-teller was gone, for the theme of the book is one that in the old days he would have treated magnificently; and it is a merely trivial book.

But "God the Invisible King" and "The Soul of a Bishop" did the trick for me. After that I did not want to read any more H. G. Wells.

This is a personal impression, and not a critical estimate of Wells's work; and so it doesn't matter that I haven't read anything of his published work (except "Parham") since 1917. The man I know is the man of the earlier books.

When I met him again in 1930, of course I noticed differences. He did not look older; but he looked much more prosperous, as no doubt he was: he had

quite a touch of the City man as he hustled towards me along the platform of Fenchurch Street station. But when we got into the train, and, having arranged his paraphernalia of magazines and papers, he held me with his bright eye and smiled, I found that there was a lot of the boy in him yet. But there was no hint of the cherub.

At Dunmow station we got into Wells's car, and he took me home to Easton Glebe. He knew all about everything and everybody that we passed; plainly the old hungry curiosity was as alive as ever. The eye was as keen. But did it see visions?

When we got to the Glebe, I found it a lovely place—spacious and dignified, yet simple, with fine sweeping vistas of meadow and wood.

He took me over the lawn, past some fine trees and a rose-garden, and so into a sedate sunken garden with a lily-tank, where the wider perspectives are hidden from you. Then the barn with its gnarled beams and a desolate ping-pong table.

"We played a game called Ball-game here," he said. "Everybody used to play."

He looked with satisfaction on all he showed me, pointing out its quality as if he were introducing me to an old friend. Any regret he may have had he did not show. He had been happy there for twenty years—in fact since last I had seen him in Church Row. And now he was saying good-bye to all that.

"Who's coming?" I asked.

"Sir Thomas Devitt, the Rugby international," said Wells. "He's just married. It's a good place for young people to begin in. They'll build up their own life here. I've done with it, and it's nice to think of leaving it to such pleasant successors."

I think Wells will take leave of the earth as he took leave of his house, and with as keen an interest in the next occupiers.

Wells went on: "I couldn't stop here. My life here ended when my wife died. I should soon be an

old man. And I don't want to be old. It's not going to be a good world for the venerable pose."

It was queer. Obviously he had had a keen relish for the life at Dunmow Glebe, one may say a keen love for it, as I knew he had for the life at Church Row. I imagine that he had deliberately put Church Row behind him and gone on to this new epoch just as now he was deliberately putting Dunmow Glebe and its life behind him and looking forward joyously to new things. Perhaps it is the way to keep young. Perhaps that was why he was so different.

Of course we talked and talked. I was there to obtain his views on things. So no wonder we did not talk much on the old lines. But when I did venture to suggest the story-telling epoch it seemed to me that Wells was not greatly interested. He had done with all that. And he was annoyed that people asked him why he didn't give them more Mr. Kippes and more Mr. Pollys.

I reflected that Wells was thirty-nine when he wrote "Kipps" and forty-four when he wrote "The History of Mr. Polly"; they were memories, and they are eternally young. And the books he has written since he has wanted to scrap his memories are old.

Some time during the day Wells took me shopping—for cigars, I think—in Dunmow. And again I was astonished at his lively interest in the people of the place and his wide knowledge of the things they did. I am not so sure that he knew why they did them. If he drank at the local pub. and worshipped in the local church he kept that to himself.

Well, I won't stress that. I have myself resided in a country bungalow which might almost have been perched in the void, for the little I knew first-hand of the life around it. But then I remained a Londoner. Wells had *lived* at Easton Glebe.

We had lunch in a room with a great curve of window, which could be swept back to leave you cheek-by-jowl with the countryside. Easton Glebe keeps

open house: you never feel that you are a prisoner; you never feel stuffy; perhaps you—that is I—would never feel quite at home. Almost I might have been looking through the window of an observation-car on an American railway. The train had halted to let us take in this fine bit of landscape. But I had the queer fancy that presently I should hear a whistle, see a guard waving a flag and then feel the car move on.

But it was we who moved on. After lunch Wells took me to a summer-house at the end of the garden to finish our talk.

H.G.'s daughter-in-law presided at the lunch table. It was plain that they were great chums. And when the maid came in it was as plain that she and her employer were chums too. I was struck, as I had so often been struck, with the enthusiastic friendliness of the man. Well, he was showing that friendliness to me. He had written: "I wouldn't do this"—(give this interview)—"for any other man alive. But I think I will do it for you." And he was doing it with a royal gesture.

After tea he began to tell me about the new book on the science of life that Julian Huxley, young Wells, and old Wells were preparing. He showed me the proof-copy of some of it, pointing to this and that in the letterpress, to this and that photograph—Jung, Freud, and so on—with the keenest relish. Wells is still enough of a boy to chuckle when he sees the wheels go round. But the wheels don't give him visionary glimpses now.

There is a part of our talk which is worth recording here, if only because it gives one side of Wells's character, which I shall not otherwise refer to.

W.R.T. "What are we here for?"

WELLS. "No one has ever known. No one may ever know. I know that I am here, and you are here, and that here's a table."

W.R.T. "You and me—and God—are primary facts. The table's a phenomenon."

WELLS (*with a sly wink*). "You and *I* and the table are facts. Facts are not primary and secondary. Everything else that religion or science tells us is a metaphor. For instance: God and the Fatherhood of God. We know what a father is; and, with all deference to Christian mythology, an infinite, universally present Being is incapable of fatherhood—unless the meaning of fatherhood is to be twisted beyond recognition."

W.R.T. "The orthodox will say that He is—in essentials—our Father: He created us, and He cares for us."

WELLS (*nodding with tolerant good-humour*). "I didn't create my sons, I transmitted them."

(Which, to my mind, showed that God was, not less, but more the Father.)

WELLS. "With the help of its metaphors, religion made a diagram of conduct. And I'll admit that even now, though God may not be our Father, the attitude of sonship may sometimes be a graceful one. But now science—biological science—has made another diagram. Mathematical science has made quite a number of diagrams lately. Nothing is final. But each one is apt to be more in keeping with our knowledge of verified fact than its predecessors."

W.R.T. (*sotto voce*). ". . . verified fact about tables!"

WELLS. "About any of the diagrams. Your Trinity or my evolution. The modern diagram, the biological diagram, puts all sorts of things in fresh perspective. There have been enormous changes in ideas of conduct during the past half century. We think nowadays more of truth than of belief."

(Now what the blazes does he mean by that?)

WELLS. "We criticise nowadays before we obey. We

have no use for blind faith. And we think of cleanliness instead of purity, and health instead of chastity."

W.R.T. "You don't believe in chastity?"

WELLS. "Chastity is a purely technical virtue. It means in effect repression of sexual instinct unless a duly ordained priest has given a limited sanction to desire. Then what was forbidden becomes in its lowly way virtuous. I find that—offensive. There is no reality called chastity."

W.R.T. "I don't agree. I know many chaste persons. And I know that chastity is a very splendid and useful thing."

WELLS. "Chastity is either the easy virtue of abstaining from what is not desired, or else it is repression—and repression of a peculiarly unclean, unnatural, distressing and mischievous type. I'm afraid, Titterton, this is an irreconcilable difference between us. Try a change!"

Now this stuff about sex is so monstrously untrue. Chastity is so plainly a virile virtue, while incontinence is as plainly a pitiful weakness. It is such a silly fallacy that the repression of instincts is bad (since we know that a man only achieves anything by gaining mastery over his instrument—the body) that you may think there was no need to print the stuff here.

But it does help to explain Wells. For, while H.G. believes firmly in self-discipline of many sorts and even in discipline imposed from without (for example, to repress our combative instincts) he has definitely decided that the sexual impulse should never be repressed—but only, occasionally, the result. He has made a graph of a physical weakness and called it a diagram of conduct.

Of course, even he will admit, I think, that the sexual instinct must be repressed on certain occasions :

as for example, in the street—until public conveniences have been provided. And perhaps he may admit that it should be repressed when the person desired is unwilling. Frankly I think he should not make these admissions. He should go the whole hog.

You will observe that I have just lost my temper. It is certainly true that on this point Wells and I are irreconcilable.

But I had a great day at Easton Glebe, and Wells gave me his blessing when I left him. As he stood at the gate, watching me get into his car, he looked more like the old, the middle-aged, the boy Wells of Church Row, who turned his trouser-legs up to show his suspenders, who made Floor-games for his sons, who made wonderful Floor-games of the discoveries of science and made Games up in the air and Games under the Earth and Games that played tricks with Space and Time; above all, the immortal Wells who created—no, not merely transmitted—Kipps and Mr. Polly.

And now I am going to concentrate on that true picture of Wells as I last saw him and as I know him best, and touch it up so that it becomes my imaginary portrait of Herbert George as he never revealed himself to me.

He is Kipps, he is Mr. Polly, he is Mr. Lewisham, he is Smallways from "The War in the 'Air,'" he is the young gentleman whose name I forgot in "The Wheels of Chance."

Herbert George was the son of a professional cricketer. As a child he was unwillingly conscious of the proximity of a county family. He hated all that, and repeatedly rebelled with passionate and futile violence.

He became a shop-assistant, and found his master, his masters I mean, more sordidly and meanly tyrannical than the county family. He was a sensitive boy, and the other shop-assistants made fun of him.

He always saw the funny side of things, and even

of himself, perhaps especially of himself. But only now and then was he happy—when he went away, right away from the shop, and dreamt—in a field, better still on a high cliff by the sea; best of all when he met a girl and they sat mumchance, too shy to be handfast, just dreaming.

Then he began going to science-classes, and he found there a way of release from his bondage.

At first he had no thought that he might in the end become a science master, and so be quit of the shabby, flashy, glib draper's shop for ever and ever. Science just gave him vista: new material, endless material, for dreams.

He revelled in the selflessness of science—none of that dirty trying to do a customer out of a ha'penny, none of that mean sweating of helpless assistants! Just plain, beautiful, colourless truth. But it was truth with mystery in it. He loved to see the wheels go round; and he saw them whirling off, like the wheels in the *Apocalypse*, giving him visionary glimpses of hitherto unimagined, unimaginable worlds.

It was then, when the facts of science came upon him with the force of a revelation, that he began to dream those dreams which he afterwards called "*The Time Machine*," "*The First Men in the Moon*," and "*The Invisible Man*." With this means of incantation anything was possible. And in his dreaming hours, almost everything became so.

But in his working hours the old tyranny endured. And he dreamt then of more material ways of escape. Mr. Kipps came into money, Mr. Polly ran away. He followed the careers of those little heroes, and sometimes they found a new servitude, but in the end they found rest.

Whether in his magic or his workaday dreams, the hero was always a little fellow up against tremendous forces. The forces were too much for him: Wells felt that, but his sympathies were with the little fellow, himself.

It has been said that the best fairy story is a pantomime, which shows you an ordinary fellow, somebody with a familiar dialect—perhaps Cockney, Lancashire, or Scots—making an entry into fairyland. And all those dreams of the young magician were the excursions of Wells in fairyland.

His scientific dreams taught him one tremendous truth, of which he himself may be unaware; that there is a narrow line of sanity and ordinariness in life, and on either side of it horror. That moral impinges upon you in all his magic tales, and nowhere with such terrific force as in "The Invisible Man." Though no doubt his first idea was of the fun he would have if he were invisible and let loose in that cursed draper's shop.

But the best, the most vivid dreams, are of the struggles, so comic, so pitiful, of Kipps-Polly to escape. Kipps-Polly is often foolish, but always right. The great unconquerable world with its pompous prigs, is always foolish and always wrong.

And so the Iliad and the Odyssey of Kipps-Polly go on, until, as Smallways in "The War in the Air," our hero collides with science—and survives it. Yes, though the young Wells was hungrily interested in science and its big ways, I think that for years after he had made his escape, his heart was too utterly with Kipps-Polly for him to desert that little man. And Wells, for all his early essays in world-organisation, felt that the little man is the inheritor of the earth.

As you know, he escaped from the draper's shop to become a teacher of science. But he remained a magician. He was a magician when I first knew him. Interested in science, because he liked to see the wheels go round, interested in world organisation, because he would have liked to make the wheels go round, but interested far more in people, especially in the Kipps-Pollys he saw around him, for whom he had a shade of contempt because they muddled

things so, but infinite good-humoured understanding and humorous sympathy.

A very lovable man is that young Wells, ay, is this older Wells of to-day, who has so much of the young Wells still in him. He himself is not much interested in the H. G. Wells of some years ago, but I am interested in him. He was one of the most friendly fellows that I had ever met, one of the most understanding.

Since he has deserted Jack and gone over to the side of the giant—he does that in “The Autocracy of Mr. Parham”—I suppose he will never write another Mr. Polly. But he will always *be* Mr. Polly. And I have always wondered whether or no young Herbert George did really fight the uncle. I hope he did.

## V

### SIR THOMAS BEECHAM

I KNEW the back of Sir Thomas Beecham's head for years before I had more than a nodding acquaintance with his face. It is true that I got a glimpse of his front elevation when, after machine-gun fire of bows on fiddles and thunder from the house, he climbed leisurely to his rostrum, and bowed with grave, polite indifference. But then he turned, settled himself lightly in his seat, looked at the score if he had it, took the baton, fondled one wing of his moustache, raised his arms—and there was the back of his head in position before me. (But, oh, the tremendous hush that fell on the theatre when he raised his arms!)

It was a comely poll, sleek, yes, decidedly sleek, well curved, with delicate ears to it, and set in the collar with obstinate stiffness. The head of an Officer Commanding.

But the collar didn't remain stiff. Not it! Before the overture ended it was damp; before the act-curtain fell it was limp. Three times a night, they say, Sir Thomas changed his collar.

Yet the head remained stiff on the neck. Let the arms flash and dart never so wildly, let Tommy bend his trunk as he might over his orchestra in threat or entreaty, the head and neck remained rigid. And, *nota bene*, the poll remained sleek and, apparently, cool.

All the while that I watch, fascinated, the magnetic antics of the man, with flashing black arms, pale-tipped, which seemed multiple, I seek that sleek cool head as the calm centre of the storm.

No, I am wrong. Tommy is getting excited. The

head is flung back. It begins to sway, as the body has been doing already. The body seems to lift itself, and hover on the rhythm. . . . But that is a moment only. The stiffness comes back to the neck. And now, seated though he is before his desk, my little gentleman struts.

The act-curtain falls. Sir Thomas turns as the thunder rises, bows with grave, indifferent politeness, turns again to his orchestra, bows to them, and, with a laughing word to the instrumentalists just below him, disappears.

They were great times when Beecham sent us two tickets for every first-night, and there was a first-night twice a week. You could take your girl—wife or otherwise. And they always gave you the same seats. Ours were D. 20 and 21. It's true that we were sandwiched between real musical critics; but anyhow I could whisper to my wife, until the critics hushed us. Everybody was there, and in the blessedly long intervals you met them. Even old Sidney Pardon, who paid for his seat, and was in the pit, would slip round to enthuse about Wagner when we wanted him to talk about Hobbs. And you might happen on the male Sitwells, slightly aloof, perhaps, because it wasn't Russian Ballet, yet pleased with Beecham, and friendly.

Stars in the boxes, of course, beyond counting—and salutation. But you left them to the gossip-mongers.

On one occasion they provided an air-raid for us. They were playing "Tristan," I remember. But we hadn't got to the dull part yet; we were on the ship. And Tristan and Isolde—Rosina Buckman—were busy with their celebrated duet, when the air became full of jazz noises that were not in the score. The audience, who, as Sidney Pardon said, would rather

## SIR THOMAS BEECHAM

have died for Wagner than for Serbia, remained unperturbed. And Isolde rose to her top-note without a quaver. But Tristan, concerned for Isolde, whose death was not due for a couple of hours, faltered slightly. And no wonder!

However, there were other persons in the theatre more deeply stirred. A managerial gentleman, not named in the cast, and looking a ghastly anachronism in his dress-clothes, boarded the boat, waved Tristan and Isolde into silence, and addressed the house. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I regret to inform you that enemy air-craft are now approaching." And then the house laughed. For in the wild crash and hullabaloo you could scarcely hear him.

He advised us to seek refuge in the corridors, which were bomb-proof. But, apart from one or two revellers who went out for a drink, nobody stirred. Tommy looked at the managerial person as if he would have liked to kill him. Didn't he know that there was an opera on?

Getting home was the snag. For the Jews had taken possession of the Tube stations, and half-way down the staircase their presence became palpable.

Two queer incidents happened during that blissful time at Drury Lane, and one of them illustrates Tommy.

They were doing "The Valkyrie," and Erda had just been giving Wotan a piece of her mind. But for the absence of bed-furniture, you might call it a curtain-lecture. Wotan—Robert Parker—listened to her final flourish and exit, and remained solus, stunned, but still vocal.

For some while he cried his woes to the heavens, and then he sat down on a rock to think it over.

That did it. The audience, which had heard the bombs of Berlin falling without a tremor, shuddered to the roots. For now it was made plain that Parker, who wore a cloth-of-gold tunic and a royal-blue cloak—well, and sandals—was otherwise unclad.

Even the critics whispered—yes, the critics! And a dull murmur like the waves of the sea ran through the house. But Parker, blissfully unconscious of the catastrophe, sang on.

Now on sailed Brunnhilde—Rosina Buckman—and for a while she noticed nothing. Then she sank at her father's feet, and she knew all.

She put her mouth to Wotan's ear. And he dried up—completely. The rest of the duet was a solo.

Julius Harrison told me afterwards that they had to carry Parker off. For the moment he was paralysed.

The fact was that the tunic had needed altering, and it was brought back by the costumier when Parker was dressing. He tried it on, found that it fitted, and just then his *call* came. Forgetting that he hadn't his trunks on, he donned the royal-blue cloak, and ran down to his doom.

I mentioned the incident to Beecham long afterwards, and he said: "Really? I didn't notice."

The other contretemps was this: It was "Tannhäuser," and that erring minstrel was in the course of the long monologue detailing his bad success at the Vatican. The forest scene was composed of three bushy *flats*, two at the sides set slantwise, and one straight across the back.

At the psychic moment when Tannhäuser—it was Mullings—was doing that very thirsty bit about "until this staff shall bud," his dresser, meaning to pass behind the back flat, passed in front of it, right across stage—carrying on a tray a glass and a bottle of Guinness. Yes, Tommy acknowledged that he'd noticed that. I suppose it made even him feel thirsty.

I had come within the Beecham aura some time before. When Cecil Chesterton was indicted at the Old Bailey for exposing the Marconi ramp, Beecham was struck with Cecil's courage. So later on when Cecil's paper, the *New Witness*, was in a bad way financially, Beecham offered to back it—and was as good as his offer.

One of the consequences was that Ernest Newman, greatest of all musical critics, became critic for the *New Witness*, and so was introduced to London journalism. I trust that the *Sunday News* is grateful to Beecham for that.

\* \* \* \* \*

The first time I had arranged to interview Beecham, I was to meet him at a certain hour at a working-lads' club in Drury Lane.

I was warned by his Press agent to be prompt to the minute. I was, and I kicked my heels in the passage for an hour. Then I went out for one swift drink. It took me three minutes. When I returned Beecham had been, and gone.

“Just like Tommy!” said the Press agent, who was a big-torsoed Irishman with more accent than was good for him. “Sure he’s the plague of my life.” So he made another appointment for me.

This time it was at the Grosvenor House, where Beecham had a suite. I arrived betimes, and found a young lady journalist there on the same errand. *She* had an appointment for the same hour. Beecham was out—it was about half past nine in the morning—and word came down from his man that he wasn’t expected back. After a while the young lady wearied of waiting, and went; but I sat back savagely in my chair, determined to stick it until I was ejected. About an hour later word came down that Sir Thomas had returned, and would be delighted to see me. I went up in the lift still savage.

But the joyous friendly face of Sir Thomas and his eager welcoming figure changed all that. I had the snapped vision that when I entered he was lounging luxuriously in a rocking-chair. But as he stood there sparkling with bonhomie, that seemed a dream of madness. The next moment he had me seated, and himself was rocking luxuriously.

And now I had my first good look at his face. It was the face of a very delightful and very naughty boy, a naughty cherub. A cherub who had stuck on the moustache and beard of Mephistopheles—well, and perhaps the eyebrows. The eyelids were heavy, but you seldom saw them; and the eyes were infinitely friendly—frank and innocent, though mocking. I guessed that if he found a woman attractive, he would need do nothing to attract.

He had been spoken of as a “rich man in embarrassed circumstances.” But I could not imagine him embarrassed, could not imagine him otherwise than at his ease. I knew him to be a ferociously busy man, but I was sure that he never hurried, and that as soon as he had finished a task he was possessed for the moment of infinite leisure. In every moment of his thronged, but not crowded, life, he tasted the exquisite rapture of eternity.

He gave me a whisky and a cigar, and took nothing himself, but sat happily rocking.

Before pumping him for publication, I talked of Cecil Chesterton and Ernest Newman and things in general. And I told Beecham that I had first seen him, without noticing him, when he brought Chaliapine and the Russian opera to London. But then I was always up in the demi-gods, aware of nothing but the immortals on the stage.

So, having persuaded him that he would find it hard to get a word in edgeways, I got him talking.

This was the cue :

W.R.T. “I’ve always thought that a measure of your achievement is that when the name Beecham is mentioned to-day we think, not of pills, but of bills.

BEECHAM (*smiling happily*). “Are you referring to my occasionally complicated financial position?”

W.R.T. “I meant opera bills.”

BEECHAM. "Worth a number of guineas a box? Perhaps you are right in your facts. But you are woefully wrong in your conclusion. Not only were my father's pills famous, or notorious, they were popular. Whereas my opera-productions may be notorious, but they are certainly not popular. And it is by no means a great achievement that my name should be identified with opera while the English public remain so completely indifferent to the thing itself."

W.R.T. "It is interesting to reflect that you might have been a great man of business instead of a mere musician."

BEECHAM. "I might have been a man of business—how great let my enemies say. But . . .

"As you have insinuated, I was born into the pill business, and perhaps my father contributed more to the happiness, or anyhow the well-being of the human race than I have. A comparison is difficult. Anyhow, I was trained to business, and I rebelled."

(I tried to visualise that rebellion, and concluded that what really happened was that young Tom said to old Joseph: "I'm going to be a musician," and walked away.)

BEECHAM: "For one thing, the great business men seemed to me to be an illusion. They weren't good business men."

I agreed with some emphasis, though this was before the world-slump. He asked me to recall some of the greatest names in modern business, and we recalled them.

"Some of them," he said, "merely lost all their money, some of them went to gaol. Most of the others were quite unaware how they had managed to make their money and how they contrived to keep it.

"For one like myself, with a passion for logic, the

world of business was far too romantic, too wildly romantic and unreal. No wonder, then, that I turned to music—an exact science with severely logical laws.

“ But there were other reasons why I left business. If I acquired anything at Oxford it was an appetite, perhaps even a certain taste, for the arts. I brought back with me to Lancashire the conviction that life without the arts was mean and sterile. And I found—well, Lancashire of thirty years ago.

“ It was a dreadful place!

“ They tell me that the Northerner is hard. He may be so. But thirty years ago he was something far worse than that—he was brutally narrow. The typical Northerner never went to the theatre, never went to a concert-hall except to hear an oratorio, knew nothing of pictures and less of books.

“ It was a world that I could not live in. And it was a world of business.

“ Moreover, there was creeping into business at that time something which has now transformed it.

“ Considered as a matter of production and marketing, everybody not an idler or a rentier is a businessman. For instance, I produce opera and market it. But in almost every industry to-day the producer and even the merchant are of secondary importance. International currency thwarts their efforts, and plays pitch-and-toss with their profits.

“ I had a good example of that when I was over in Germany at the time when the mark was moving merrily between 300 to the pound and 300,000.

“ But at first I ignored the business side of art altogether. I was not interested in the market but only in the music. Markets disgusted me. I turned from the foolish haphazard of them to the serene logic of art.”

He said this with relish, as if he were lifting up between finger and thumb, judging, and throwing away the buzzing business-men who have bothered him throughout his career.

“ And so I came South. I had my illusions. It is

true that I found the South less narrow than the North. But—well, you know the struggle—not hopeless, because I have not abandoned it and shall not abandon it—but the desperate struggle I have had and am having to interest the English people in English opera.

“ All my work in establishing a symphony orchestra was negligible compared with the hard labour of my attempt to invent English opera. I had to produce each new opera as if it was the first day of Creation.”

“ Which,” said I, “ is precisely what you love.” He said : “ No ! ” with an emphatic rock of his chair, and then resumed his narrative.

“ Now I was interested in opera, and opera is a sort of stage-play. The dialogue—in recitative or song—the movement of the figures—in sedate or lyrical gesture—the atmosphere created by the scenery and the orchestra are all elements of the *play*. The play’s the thing.

“ But imagine my difficulty ! You need artists who are at once singers and actors. You need a tradition. You need a living organisation which is a school, a workshop, and a theatre. And I—I had nothing but some eager, some fine eager singers, and a hired stage.

“ Here is the difference illustrated : the Russian Opera Company, which I have staged once again in London, exists as a well-rooted artistic growth, drawing the strength of experience from the past, experimenting freely in the present. The thing *exists* ; and I was able to stage it in three weeks. It took me eighteen months to stage ‘ Figaro.’

“ So I founded the Imperial League of Opera, with the purpose of creating English opera. I have had set-backs, but I am not discouraged.

“ My one great fear is of the vulgarisation of taste by broadcasting. No doubt there are far more people in England aware of the existence of fine music than there were thirty years ago. But far fewer know fine music and appreciate it.

"However, I think the public will tire of its toy before I tire of my art."

"You must come to hear 'Prince Igor,'" said Beecham as I said good-bye. "I'll send you tickets." He sent me two, and two for "Boris"—for the first-nights. The tickets were at a premium, and I could see Hammond, the manager of the Lyceum, tearing his hair. . . .

I had to go down to the theatre to get him to initial the report of the interview. And I found him in the midst of the dress-rehearsal of "Boris."

This was a frolicsome Beecham, out of the eye of the elegant public he despised. He once said to me: "The common people of England love music, but know nothing about it. The others pretend to know something, and either they hate music, or it bores them." There were lots of people in the stalls, but they were either his friends or his henchmen. He could frolic before them.

He jollied his instrumentalists, he jollied the Russian actors—it would be an insult to call them merely *singers*. The orchestra rippled, but the Russians looked at him solemnly, and did not understand.

When he was waiting to begin the second act he cried: "Where is the *Corne d'anglais*? Making love to the ladies of the chorus no doubt. Very natural. But I want him." When one of the *winds* played a solo with unction he remarked: "Very beautiful!" and the orchestra roared.

And though he became alert, dominant, electric when he had tapped with his baton and raised his arms, he allowed his body and limbs to dance more freely than ever, and not for a moment was the sleek head stuck stiffly on a rigid neck.

As soon as a halt came he relaxed completely. He lounged, he turned round to talk to his friends, he sunned himself in the light of what he had just done and would anon be doing.

I was entranced. I had never heard him conduct so

well before. No, not even in Mozart, that he loved beyond all other masters. There was a grasp and, above all, an élan that made the performance unique. I knew then that he gave to his friends what he could not give to the swell mob.

The last time I needed to see Beecham he was difficult, not merely to catch, but to track. He had left the Grosvenor; and only by using the fine arts of the detective did I succeed in running him to earth. I rang him up on the telephone, and by good luck it was he himself who replied. If you can get a word with Beecham there is little he can refuse you. That's why he hides.

I was to come to see him a few days later—this time I think at nine, but it may have been a little after that. Anyhow, I was there a few minutes before my time, and of course Sir Thomas had gone out: was not expected back. So I said that I had an appointment, and would wait. Tommy's wise and venerable retainer looked doubtful, but let me enter.

For half an hour I waited, and then the venerable retainer came to tell me that I was in luck. Two other gentlemen had arrived to see Sir Thomas by appointment, and I gathered that they were important gentlemen, who would not, like a footling journalist, come on a fool's errand.

A little later he trod lightly in again, and said that Sir Thomas had arrived, but must see the other gentlemen at once on really important business. If I would take a walk round the district for half an hour, Sir Thomas would see me then. I took the walk, and damned the licensing laws, for it was not yet opening time.

So perhaps I was back too early. Anyhow, the important gentlemen were still closeted with Sir Thomas. As the archdeacon and I walked down the passage one of them darted out in wild terror, stared me over, and then vanished with a slam of the door. I was shown into a dressing-room where the arch-

deacon proceeded with the care-and-culture of sundry suits of Sir Thomas's clothes.

Presently we were joined by two persons, the one jocular, the other sedate, but both plainly belonging to a firm or firms. They talked of Tommy, and I shall not give them away. But the jocular one said : "The tales I could tell of Tommy ! They'd make a book. I shall write it one day for the *Sunday Depress* —when Tommy's dead." The archdeacon looked up from his brushing with a crinkled smile, as if to say that he knew more tales than anybody, but would die himself rather than tell them.

Ultimately I was ushered into the presence—leaving the Old Firm behind me—and plunged at once into a world where there is no time.

Sir Thomas was more delightful than ever. Before he had finished apologising I had forgotten that I had waited. We talked of everything, but especially of music. I told him that I had just written the lyrics for a musical version of "Trilby," composed by Isadore de Lara.

"And how is Isadore ?" he inquired, with the air of one solicitous for a dear old friend who when last heard of was poorly.

I told him that some day I should write a new libretto for "The Magic Flute," and he blessed the venture. "Come to me when you do, and I may be able to help you." And I said to myself : "If I can catch you I am sure that you will."

A few days later I read in the papers that Sir Thomas had met his creditors, and had been received with respect and even affection. So I knew what he and the important gentlemen had been talking about.

## VI

## JOHN MASEFIELD

THE first time I saw Masefield was at the St. Martin's Theatre when we were doing his "Melloney Holt-spur" in the Playbox series. He looked quite out of place behind the scenes, though he has written so many fine plays; and he wandered amid the ruck of scenery and actors like a ghost from "Melloney."

I found a queer contradiction in his face. His forehead was strong, his wide-set, well-open eyes and longish straight nose were bold, adventurous. And he had the keen faraway glance you find with all sailors. But the mouth was delicate. And the whole atmosphere of the face, the whole manner of the man, was shy, diffident, dreamy. Well, there was a certain noble austerity about the dream.

"I'm afraid," he said to me, with an embarrassed but friendly smile, "that you'll find very little material for publicity in me. Nothing ever happens to me except that now and then I publish something. You had better write about the actors. After all, it is the actors that matter in the theatre." And then he drifted away.

Left to himself, Masefield would have gone through life writing fine poems in a quiet corner, well content to be able to live and write. In the old days all those who loved verse read Masefield. But the Big Circulations had never heard of him and his Seawater Ballads—not even of

'Rum alone's the tipple and the heart's delight  
Of the old bold mate of Henery Morgan,'

It was Austin Harrison let the world into the secret by devoting one whole issue of the *English Review* to Masefield's first great narrative-poem: "The Everlasting Mercy." Great editing! as Bernard Shaw said when Tucker devoted a whole number of his Anarchist monthly to the publication of Shaw's polemic on "The Sanity of Art." Several re-prints of that number of the *English Review* were sold out, and the book itself went into many editions.

Masefield was *made*. But, being a dedicated poet, he has managed to survive it.

Yet I don't think that even then News Editors on popular dailies were really aware of him. Only when Robert Bridges died and his neighbour on Boar's Hill, Oxford, reigned in his stead, did Masefield become News. Then I was sent down to see him. He invited me to tea.

The way from the foot of Boar's Hill is rough and hot in the dry, and probably quaggy in wet weather. But there is a view of cool green from the crest of it; and once inside Masefield's quiet house all the roughness and the heat are forgotten.

He came in from the garden through the French windows to meet me, clad in some white summer-stuff, and took my hand—a little downcast, but smiling.

We sat down, shyly—both of us. From my chair I could see the Laureate's wreath hanging on the wall.

There was an uneasy pause. But when Masefield saw that I was shy too, things went better.

When we had plunged into the subject, Masefield said: "I think you cannot better the old formula" (for the business of man) "To work for the glory of God."

W.R.T. "The most unlikely people have told me that. But why should you believe in God?"

MASEFIELD. "I don't think that you can argue about

it. Those who have faith have it, and those who haven't can't believe. Faith is one of the senses."

W.R.T. "Like sight. Yes! Well, I can understand that the poet may work for the glory of God, but can you say the same of the work to which most men in England are condemned to-day? To be the mere slave of the machine! Can such work be done for God's glory?"

MASEFIELD (*with quiet relish*). "I knew a cooper once who took great pride in his work. He used to hold his nails in his mouth, and hammer them in at a terrific rate. No man could beat him at that."

W.R.T. "I remember a fellow who used to do clog-dances on the Halls. His triumph was that he could keep on dancing longer than any other dancer."

(Masefield nodded his approbation.)

W.R.T. "Well, I think he might better have had a pride in his *dance*. And your cooper might have had a pride in making fine barrels. . . ."

(It seemed impudent and impertinent of me to say this to a man who had devoted his life to the making of fine verse, when I was by no means sure of the quality of my journalism. But I had to make my point, so I went on):

W.R.T. "But what pride in his work can a machine-minder have?"

MASEFIELD. "I knew a cutter who did nothing but put the yarn in position to be cut. He took great pride in it."

(My point was taken, and I think answered. But the propagandist in me was awake.)

W.R.T. "That was heroic. But what a waste of heroism!"

MASEFIELD. "I agree. Yes, modern life has gone wrong. It all comes from the drift to the

cities." (Here I felt inclined to clap hands.) "Country life is real, and while it was the usual thing, it kept all other work in touch with reality. Washing dishes is dull work, but the farm-maid does not merely wash dishes. Shifting manure is dull work, but a farm-labourer does more than that.

"And all the crafts that depend on or radiate from agriculture are as fine. Think what splendid varied work a blacksmith does! Think what a jolly job a village carpenter has!"

W.R.T. "But all that is dying out, they say."

MASEFIELD. "I don't know. There is great endurance in simple things. And in spite of bad harvests and hard times generally I have known high fun and feasting with song and dance at a Harvest Home. But the monstrous growth of cities is spoiling it all."

W.R.T. "I think that I am instinctively a citizen. I agree with you about country-life. Yet I want to live in a city."

MASEFIELD. "But you live in London, and London is not a city. It is a huge sprawl of districts that don't know each other.

"I lived in London for twenty years, and I liked it only for the sake of a few friends that I used to meet. There was a little coterie. Yeats and Synge were members. Then I used to meet Edward Garnett and Edward Thomas in Gerrard Street for lunch. The rest of London meant nothing to me. I never knew London."

W.R.T. "I love London. Yet I am afraid that you're right. There is no London to know. There are bits of it—in Poplar, for example, and Chelsea, in Bloomsbury and Clerkenwell—bits dismembered and submerged. But there is no general civic life, no civic spirit. I sup-

pose that is so because the balance between city and country life has been destroyed."

MASEFIELD. "I suppose so. But the strange thing is that I found Manchester a real city. Can you explain that? It needed a real city to make that ship canal. And there are other things. . . .

"I was on the *Manchester Guardian* for some months, and going to the office to help make this thing which was then nothing and would be born by daylight, I felt, well, that I was a citizen."

W.R.T. "Of no mean city. But" (with all my pride in my craft surging up) "you might have felt the same on a London newspaper."

(And I said to myself: "Yes, that little tangled patch round Fleet Street, for all its Combines and its lies, is a very real city still.)

"So," I went on, "you have been a working-journalist."

MASEFIELD. "Oh, yes, and on other newspapers."

W.R.T. "And you have been a sailor."

MASEFIELD. "For a much longer period. But I was a sailor only because I had to be."

W.R.T. "No longing to go down to the sea again?"

MASEFIELD. "Not that I can remember. I went as a sailor because I had to earn my living somehow, and that was the job that presented itself. But I was continually wanting to get away from it."

(He thought for a moment, as if he were looking back on that time.)

"You see," he went on, with a shy smile, "I wanted to read all the books in the world; and on shipboard . . ."

(The smile ended in a friendly grin, and we laughed together.)

W.R.T. "But don't you think that sub-consciously you were drawn to the sea-life? The soul of a writer craves experience."

MASEFIELD. "I'm afraid I don't know how a man selects his experience. Perhaps he can turn any sort of experience to account. No doubt looking back I am glad that I went to sea."

W.R.T. "Do you think that the typical sailor loves his work?"

MASEFIELD. "He takes great pride in his work, and he loves his ship. It is a marvel how he tittivates her up before she gets into port. And he has such a hard life of it."

W.R.T. "You get with the sailor what you get with the farm-worker?"

MASEFIELD. "Yes. The rick-builder crowns the rick with grace-notes, and the sailor paints and curls his lady-love as for a bridal. Moreover, just as there is song at the Harvest Home, there is song at the capstan-bar."

W.R.T. "I suppose all that has gone with masts and sails."

MASEFIELD. "Not entirely! The crew of any sort of steamer will make the old boat pretty for the port. And the seaman's way of looking at the sea has not changed at all."

W.R.T. "What is that way? Does he love her, or hate her?"

MASEFIELD. "Both? Neither? I don't know. Certainly he respects her—is always thinking of her as—yes, as a friendly, though ruthless, antagonist. He has no animosity. And he's quite ready to shake hands before and after the battle."

W.R.T. "Has the sailor as a rule any sense of the mystery of the sea?"

MASEFIELD. "Oh, a profound sense of it. All men in touch with real things have a sense of the mystery of nature, but none so deep a sense as the seaman has of the mystery of the element which carries him, fights him, and destroys him."

I think it was the same evening that a lot of jolly young people came in, and there was talk of plays to be performed in country places, and things happening in the University, and of things being written, as well as of quite personal things. Masefield dwelt in the midst of the merry talk with a quiet steady flame.

When I left the house, carried in a packed, joyous car down to the city, I took with me a sense of the silver serenity of Masefield's life. I know that he can be irritated, because I have irritated him. But he is a happy man. And there is no poet that I have met who is so plainly listening to that strain, just heard, from some far shore the final chorus sounding.

## VII

### SIR HARRY LAUDER

WHEN first did I see him? Perhaps it was at the Tivoli, perhaps at the Oxford. Anyhow, it was at one of the Syndicate Halls, in the gay old days of Victoria.

There were music-halls in those days, and there were giants. The words of the songs they have left behind them give you no better idea of what the Halls were like than a dictaphone record of the backchat of two sweethearts would give you of love-making.

Of course the parallel is imperfect, for lovers need no audience, and the music-hall audience was half the battle. Every performance was a festival, a night out. The performers were not a class apart, they seemed to have stepped up from the audience, just to set the fun going; and they typified us: it was we ourselves that we saw and heard upon the stage.

It was the festival of the people—and the people then included the toff as well as the coster. All the incidents of our daily life were celebrated, all the jolly things, all the sad things, all the funny things, all the annoying ones—though the aggrannoyances were turned to laughter, and even the beak, the bilker, the nagging wife, and the mother-in-law had no sting.

While the English Drama concerned itself with unreal stilted comedies of the drawing-room, English comedy, which Shakespeare and Dickens saw and re-created, lived its own natural life on the Halls.

And the show was always a sing-song. You never went merely to listen, you went to sing. You chorused

a song three, four times over; and when the band stopped you sometimes sang the chorus unaccompanied, and gave yourselves the loudest clap of all.

The waiters came round with the drinks; that was a part of it, as it is a part of every true sing-song, of every true festival. But it was not a drunken occasion. It was a very jolly one.

This is the atmosphere into which the great little Scotsman tripped, danced, or swaggered.

The bell rings, the number changes; we burst into anticipatory applause. The band breaks into a Scottish lilt, and the curtain parts.

A middling-sized man with big limbs in plaid and kilt, and huge homely features under a feathered bonnet, jaunts on the stage. He struts round it like a prize bantam, smiling broadly, quirking his head to the rhythm of the music, and giving vent from time to time to a comical "Och!" whereto a burst of genuine gutturals and ghostly echo of Cockney aspirates reply.

How beautifully poised he is! Why, he treads as if on air, his big limbs move with the daintiness of a prima ballerina. The lilt of the music runs through his body and breaks to radiance in his universal smile. We chuckle at the mere sight of him—"Och!"

He stops before us, the mouth open in blissful ecstasy. The music of the band dies down.

He sings, in a full clear tuneful voice—sings to you, just you; to me, just me, and yet to all of us as one man and one lassie. He takes us into his confidence, he buttonholes us; he wouldn't tell this to everybody, mind ye, but seein' it's us . . .

He tells us of a great spree they had, he breaks into patter. He tells you of all the funny things that happened; he doubles himself with laughter; he screams at the fun of it. And then suddenly he realises that

perhaps you are laughing *at* him, and his face empties of fun. He takes on a preternatural gravity, his crafty eyes blink, and his voice assures you, "Et was a ferst-class affeerr, mind ye!"

And the queer thing is that, though every gesture, every look is laughable, it all swings to a rhythm, and though he gives himself completely away, there is a natural dignity about him that is not comical. His funniness is the humour of a live man, not the antics of a scarecrow.

And then suddenly he is gone; the audience gives a gasp before it breaks into thunder; and we realise that he has held us in a spell.

And now he is a Glasgow street-lout, an oaf of a school-boy, a Scottish workman—slow, deliberate, cunning, good-humoured. Every character is done from and to the life, not drawn but sculptured, and the sculpture breathes.

At last the band begins with the tune we know. We start humming it. Our hearts glow.

A weird zigzag stick, tartan and bonnet, the jaunt divine, the smile complete.

He leans forward over the footlights, and the words come out like pearls. His eyes are half-shut, the great lips are curved and parted. . . . More than any artist that ever I saw or heard he gives me a sense of innocent ecstasy. He has the gift of Happiness.

When I got away from his turn and considered, I found that Lauder had given the English Music-Hall a new thing. There had been Scotch comedians, but they had been quite negligible. We had had English country types, but they had been mere clichés.

Our strength had been the Metropolitan, and mainly the London Cockney singer, who had shown how the spirit of men survived in the turmoil and squalor of city life.

Lauder gave us city types, but they were degraded. His revelation was of the simple Scottish peasant firm-based on real things.

Such was my first glimpse of Harry Lauder. And my first quarrel with a Scotsman was with a benighted gentleman from the lang toon o' Kirka'dy who told me that Harry Lauder could neither dance nor sing, and was, forreby, a blank slander on Auld Caledonia.

I have never been quite sure in my own mind why Lauder is less popular in Scotland than he is in England. Is it because he gives *all* types of Scotsmen, and some of them ne'er-do-weels? Is it because, in spite of his romantic manner, he is at heart a stern realist, and the Scots, like the Irish, do not wish to be seen as they are? Or is it just one facet of his realism, which, because of his pride and obstinacy, he has pushed in the face of the enemy, so that in perspective it dwarfs the rest? Are they angry that he is reputed mean, and glories in the shame?

Whatever may be the determining cause, Lauder's is an outstanding case of a great artist belittled by his countrymen.

As to this meanness! It is highly needful that the modern world should recognise the difference between meanness and prudence. Only the prudent man has the right to be generous. If you do not value the gift there is no virtue in the giving.

Now Lauder is a peasant. It is true that as a lad he was a miner, but he comes of peasant stock—men that made their money out of the land by the sweat of their brow, dug and ploughed and reaped their pennies from the stubborn earth, and thanked God on their knees when the money-box jingled and the tiny harvest grew.

The welfare of the farm and of the home that blossomed out of it depended on those clay-stained savings. To give a penny out of the box was like robbing your wife or your children of a bit of bread.

And so the peasant is prudent, he weighs every penny that he takes from the box. But he can be wonderfully generous, too; though he prefers to be generous in service, in hospitality, in the fruits of the

earth not yet marketed, rather than with these counters for which he has sweated blood.

Hard come, hard go !

The gambler—and most of us who do not produce necessities approximate to that type—sees and, what is more, feels things differently. It is easy come and easy go with him. He may be far less generous in personal services than the peasant, but the counters which come to him by chance are scattered without thought. He will scoff when he hears that Lauder, already earning good money, held up a shoe, which he had been trying on, to a face all corrugated with horror, and said to the shoemaker : “ Two pound two shillin’s for a pair of shoes ! Man, that’s fair extortionate.”

No doubt he exploited the stigma. He found it good publicity, and, as he told me afterwards, it kept the spongers at bay. When he came up to London, entirely unknown, with nothing but his skill and his courage to pit against the firmly entrenched London favourites, he had a home in Scotland to keep going. And he earned little, though he made his name in a night.

Compelled to visit bars, as all variety artists were then, prudence, and the thought of his home away there, compelled him to call canny. The gamblers round him flung their money on the counter, and, ma conscience, pocketed the change without counting it ! The young Scottish singer regarded them as selfish monsters. But if they wanted to waste their money, that was their affair.

So the legend of his meanness grew like a snowball, and he himself pushed it merrily along. When I met him, the snowball was as big as a house, and Lauder was perched inaccessibly on the top of it. He had so long boasted of being mean that perhaps there was now something of meanness fortifying the prudence and masking the native generosity of the man.

I met him when the revue “ Three Cheers ” was

produced at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, in December, 1916.

Lauder was to have toured South Africa under contract to Joseph Leopold Sacks, a little Jew who looks and talks exactly like Potash, the partner of Perlmutter. Sacks has his enemies, but I'm fond of him, and so is Sophie Tucker, and she's a good judge.

But the War put the South African tour out of question, and so Joe Sacks had the opportunity of staging Lauder in London.

Knowing little about the London stage, though everything about South Africa, Sacks fished for a partner, with Lauder as the bait, and hooked André Charlot.

They made a queer combination. Charlot is a large Frenchman who hides a pretty wit and immense agility under a ponderous exterior. On one occasion he suggested to Sacks that they should postpone production until Holy Week.

“Vat's Holy Week?” asked Sacks.

“Mr. Sacks,” said Charlot solemnly, “it is the one week in the year when we can get actors half-price.”

Sacks was all for the postponement.

But the show opened in December, and I was sent down to the theatre by the *Sunday Herald* to interview Lauder. I was surprised to find him a little man—he had bulked so much bigger on the stage.

I don't remember where I interviewed him; I have the idea that I walked with him to the Bonnington, in Southampton Row. Anyhow, it is at the Bonnington that I got to know Harry Lauder; and it is there in his sitting-room that we will meet him now.

It is my second day with him. We are seated near the fire, for it is a cold December day. Lauder offers me some tobacco, and we fill our pipes.

I produce a matchbox. “No, sir,” says Harry Lauder solemnly, “I won't waste a spunk where there's plenty of paper and a fire.” And he took

from the mantelpiece a spill, lighted it, and puffed away as if with an added satisfaction.

I have come from my paper with the suggestion that he should write a series of articles for the *Herald*, I to be the dictaphone or amanuensis.

“Ay,” said Lauder, thoughtfully. “Well, I’ve a lot to say, and at a time like this it behoves every public man to keep up the spirits of the rank and file. Ay, it’s an idea.”

Then he stared at me silently for a full minute, with puckered brows and pursed lips.

Finally, he announced oracularly: “It would be a grand attraction for your newspaper.”

I agreed; but suggested that it would also be good publicity for him.

Ignoring that point, he asked what my paper would be prepared to pay. I told him, and he accepted the offer without delay.

That disposed of, he dropped the business-man, and became altogether the host. And Lauder is a very gracious and friendly host.

But what struck me was the tremendous seriousness of the man. Flashes of fun lit up his talk, and then he laughed like a naughty schoolboy. But at the back of it all, never forgotten, and ever and again taking full possession of the man, was that tremendous seriousness.

Life for him was not a fribble, human relationships were not a manner of speaking. We were here—mankind on earth, and us two in the Bonnington—for a great purpose.

Every now and then he gave a hint of this in his speech, and he expressed it all the while in his presence. The comedian of the Halls was very far away . . . or was he? As the cunning smile lit up his face, I had a vision of his turn, and I realised that behind all the jokes and the fantastic costumes was earnestness like an impregnable rock.

Well, we talked. I went away and wrote, and the

next day brought the proof. So it went on week by week, long after the run of "Three Cheers" was ended, and was only broken for a while when he went out to sing at the Front.

We talked and talked. Of the need to fight, and what we were fighting for. Of the splendour of the world, and above all of our own bit of it. Of the simple country-life, its ardours and endurances, and the plain fact that the peasant-farmer was the centre and meaning of things.

We talked of young lovers courting, and the magic and frolic of first love. We talked of true love lasting through marriage to the grave, of the wee things growing, and human joys and sorrows clustering thick. Of the desperate shifts of decent homely folk to keep the wolf from the door, and, mark you, the immortal fun of the shifts, however grimly the face might set at the thought of the desperation.

For this successful artist, almost a millionaire, felt very close to the biting hard times of his boyhood when he took on a man's job in a fatherless home.

Sometimes Mistress Lauder sat with us. A great lady, gentle, serene, and strong. She would be knitting or sewing. And she would give a secret look at Lauder now and then that was meant to be inscrutable. But I read love and pride in it, and now and again, when he was at his tricks, the sedate amusement of a mother with her roguish boy. A marvellous dignity she had, as she sat there with her fingers busy, a marvellous simplicity. A grand couple they were. Well, Harry Lauder could not go far wrong with such a wife to come home to.

Sometimes I would take the proof to the theatre, pass the word in by long Tom Vallance, his brother-in-law, dresser, and secretary, and enter the dressing-room, to find Harry in deshabille. Gravely Harry would take the galley of the print, gravely put on his spectacles, and then, with his trousers half on, maybe, and Tom making valiant efforts to fasten the

braces, would read the article as though the fate of empires, as well as Hippodromes, depended on it.

One day I went to the Bonnington with a letter in my pocket from the Ministry of Food. It was a circular (a number of my journalist pals had got it) imploring all those who had influence on public opinion to urge economy in the use of bread. I thought this would be a good subject for the Sunday article.

When I arrived, Lauder said : " Wully Titterton, I've had a most important communication from the Ministry of Food. I'll read it to ye." He opened a drawer, took out a document, put on his spectacles, and read.

The gist of the letter was that, knowing what tremendous influence Mr. Lauder had, the Minister implored him to use it to urge the public to economise in the use of bread. " And we'll do it," said Harry with simple earnestness, " we'll do it." Yes, Harry could speak from the heart on the domestic economy of bread.

It was on this occasion he told me that he was to be made Sir Harry.

But one morning when I came into his sitting-room, I found him sitting there alone with his dead pipe in his fist, staring at nothing. He had been weeping—the marks of tears were still on his cheeks—and when he rose and came towards me he moved like a very old man.

" We'll do no work to-day," he said in a quiet, level tone, " my son, Captain Lauder . . ." and then broke down.

The boy had been a subject they were both eager to talk about. Their love for each other was centred on him. Harry worked, and she lived for him. Harry had sent him out to the Front with a cheer; but we are prone to think our sons immortal. And now they would never see him again; he was just wiped out.

“ Man Titterton,” he said, “ how can I go down to the theatre to-night, and prance about, with him lying dead—God knows where or how? ”

He sank in a chair, and sat there a while silent, looking very desolate. Then he started up, and said fiercely :

“ I can’t do it, I won’t do it. It’s more than flesh and blood can bear.”

Of course I pointed out that he was the show, that without him it would collapse, and that a large number of people would be thrown out of work—at a bad time.

In the end he said he would do it. But he asked me to be in front. “ It’ll help me to know that someone there understands.”

So I was there. He got a great reception that seemed to stagger him, but he went on. At last came the thing he was afraid of—his song, “ When the Boys Come Marching Home.”

He began, he broke down, he tried again. It was agonising. You wanted to shout out, telling them to stop torturing the man. But he got himself together, and he finished triumphantly. You can imagine the applause.

When I saw him next morning he was quite worn out. It had been a dreadful trial. “ But, man, what a reception! ”

Well, he had his small consolation. But he never got over the loss of his son. I dare not say anything of the grief of Mrs. Lauder.

One day a little later he showed me the design for a plaque in memory of Captain John Lauder—perhaps the sculptor was there, I do not remember—and Harry said the price was ridiculous, and that he could get the job done in Scotland as well and for half the sum. But the plaque was put up, and the price unabated.

We made a book of the articles : “ Harry Lauder’s Logic.” And then he left for America, to help—

and he helped mightily—to bring America into the War.

The next time I saw him was at the Palace Theatre, where he appeared under the ægis of the Impresario King, Mr. William Morris. That gentleman had prepared a unique programme, on the back whereof were portraits of Scotland's three greatest men—Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott as supporters, and, crowning the design, Sir Harry Lauder. I suppose that Mr. Morris was responsible for this, but Harry must have been accessory before the fact, or how did Mr. Morris hear of Walter Scott and Bobby Burns?

Harry was in the foyer before the show, shaking hands with the critics. He was in his Highland regalia, funny stick and all.

He gave a marvellous performance—practically the whole evening's entertainment. At the end of it he came to the footlights, and made his usual friendly speech. He was glad to be among all his old friends again. And he mentioned two that he saw in the house, Tommy Lipton and Johnny Dewar. He *was* glad to see us all again, and he had no time to mention everybody.

Since then, when he is not travelling, he is at Dunoon, where he is by way of being a laird. I always knew he would take root. If only he had a son to follow after.

I was not in his company round about the time when his wife died. If and when I meet him again I shall ask him no questions about that. I know how they loved each other.

Well, that's Harry Lauder. A great artist certainly, a genius I think. He never sang a song that would dirten the mind; he sang many that were, that are an inspiration. A simple man and sincere, though, like all artists except the scoundrels, the lover of applause. There is no guile in those clear peasant eyes of his, if a world of cunning.

## VIII

### JACOB EPSTEIN

WHEN first I saw Epstein we were both young, but he was much younger. I was a clerk at Spring Gardens by day, and a revolutionary-cum-dilettante of an evening. At a Bloomsbury gathering of such folk, bric-à-brac folk, I met him.

He had come across from Paris, where he worked; but he might have dropped out of the moon. Not that he resented the earnestly frivolous atmosphere—the shaded lamp, the cushions (a symphony in blue) for squatting on the floor, the carefully disordered locks, the Liberty ties, the occasional velvet jacket. Perhaps he did not notice it, perhaps he accepted it, but as something not important. I don't know. He sat there very quietly, altogether at ease, sometimes very solitary and abstracted with eyes cast down, smiling under clustering curls—a charming boyish smile, friendly and frank, and yet keeping something (what was it?) in reserve.

Once or twice he looked at me, and I did not know what to make of the glance. He had fine eyes, with luminous depths. They were, you would say, very expressive, and yet impudently reticent. The glance passed over me as if summing me up, and was gone.

I was not, I think, entirely bric-à-brac. I had done a little active service of the Movement in my spare time, and this dilettante savouring of life-and-letters on the palate sometimes amused, sometimes bored, and sometimes disgusted me.

But this boy, not at all in revolt against the atmosphere, yet bulked in it far more boldly than I did. He

had his own inflexible purpose, but for the moment he was resting. Only the eyes went on seeing.

While he was in London I saw a good deal of him, and lost that first impression. With some others we made an up-river excursion, and I found that he could frolic joyously, though gravely.

In many ways he was altogether a boy. And yet all the while he had the air of holding himself in reserve for his great purpose.

I felt that, if he would, he might have overpowered us with his vitality, but he didn't care to do it. It was not mercy. He had none of that.

We took turns, when tired of sculling, at towing the skiff. One day he was tugging along the bank, and a group of boys called after us that we were brutes to make the poor "nigger" slave for us. (His curly hair was jet black.) He looked at them as a panther might look before it sprang—very calmly; then turned his head and trudged on. It was frightening. Oh, by the bye, we called him Baghera.

One day, after a dip, he said to me: "You've got a fine figure. Why do you waste your time as a clerk? You'd make your name in Paris as a model."

Now that thrilled me. For, since first I read Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" I had dreamt of casting my conventional life behind me, and taking the open road. The Latin Quarter of Paris was not precisely the Open Road, but it seemed to me to be the Open Doorway.

So I agreed in the end to go to Paris. As a beginning, I was to pose for him—then for the Academies. After that, he said, there would be a scramble to hire me.

I went. I found Epstein in his sculptor's studio. But in Paris they call it an *atelier*—a workshop. And that's what it looked like. A great bare room, negligible odds and ends of furniture in corners of the wide concrete floor space; in one corner a bath full of wet clay, a small wooden platform in the centre with a

modelling-stand fairly near it, a pervading smell of fixative and modelling clay. An anchorite's workshop.

It was early morning, but Epstein received me at the door in shirt and trousers with his shirt-sleeves rolled up and clay-stained hands. I am not sure that, as soon as I had taken possession of my own studio, I came back to his, stripped, and climbed the platform, but that's what it seems like. I know that he was poised during what interval there was with impatient expectancy.

And when we began he was transfigured. All that reserve was gone, all that vitality was in action, the face was incredibly alive and eager, the eyes—depths beyond depths—enveloped and searched, inexhaustibly curious, and yet all the while possessed by a vision. And all the while the lithe artist flashed between the heap of clay (clawing a lump of it) and the modelling-stand. Now stooping, now standing a-tip-toe, the eyes drawn to me as to a magnet. And all the while on the modelling-stand the clay figure grew—those big strong nervous hands caressing the clay into form, into life and movement.

I was fascinated. The pose was twisted and hard to keep, and for a novice was mere torture. Pins-and-needles danced through my limbs, my neck and back were one ache. But I could not have cried a halt. That flaming mass of energy controlled me.

At last, with a sigh of discontent, he said: "*C'est l'heure*"—it was more than time—and I with a sigh of relief creaked down to the concrete. Epstein busied himself with the clay model while I rubbed my limbs back to life.

We had become very good friends in England, we were very good friends now. But I was conscious that while he was at work I did not exist for him except as a means to materialise his vision. Well, he did not exist either, the demon possessed and drove him. This was the first time I had seen Dionysius in action, and he frightened me.

At the end of the day, a great friend of his, Gussow, a painter, strode in. He was a solid, stocky fellow with a thick moustache and a friendly grin. His small eyes twinkled at you from under lowered lids in the painter's way.

He seemed much more interested in people than Epstein was, and to be finding life great fun. He looked all the workman. Like Will Dyson.

At the little restaurant near the Rue de Rennes to which we went for dinner, we met Sammy Halpert, the *complete artist*, with long locks, butterfly-tie, and balloon trousers. Gussow and he talked to me throughout the meal, Epstein from time to time as if tearing himself from the vision of things. I saw him once or twice look at his own hand to note the play of light on its surfaces. And this was done altogether naively and without a trace of affectation. Not only did he not care what we and the world thought, he was not aware of it.

We went on to Halpert's studio, a ramshackle hut near the Lion de Belfort. It stunk of paint, it was crowded, cosy, and untidy. There was a piano, and Nina sang.

That was a gay evening. But often enough after work Epstein, Gussow, and I would sit in the studio, with the colourless light filtering through the high up north-windows, doing nothing, saying but little, Gussow and I smoking, but Epstein wrapt in contemplation.

I should have liked a hand at cards or a match at shove-ha'penny. But they didn't play games.

Sometimes we went to a concert, or to the Opera Comique, or the Theatre Antoine. The best fun was at the Concerts Rouges, near the Luxembourg, where for one franc twenty-five you got a drink and fine music. The usual drink was cherry brandy, and at the close of the concert you ate the cherry.

I liked the place for the life of it—the queer types, for this was the true Latin Quarter, of which Halpert

was a parody. But Epstein sat entranced. Gussow gave his ears to the music and his eyes to the crowd; Epstein was all ear. Entranced, but super-sensitive to false playing—physically hurt by it.

On certain afternoons—how often a week, I forget—there was a concert in the Luxembourg Gardens, and we and a host of other Latin Quarter folk promenaded round the band and its thick hedge of seats where the bourgeois sat. Friendly and hostile glances greeted us as we circled; it seemed to me that Epstein was somewhat contemptuously aloof.

When I had settled down to that life I noticed that Epstein flitted in and out of it. When he was not there he was in another world, with friends of whom we knew nothing. When he was with us he was never unfriendly, never consequential; but you felt that while you had your pastimes he remained conscious of his dedication. I respected him immensely for that devotion, yet it was disturbing.

Women, except for the Ninas, and them he ignored, were seldom in our company. When such a comet swept into our heavens, Epstein could, better than any of us, be the gallant companion. The ardent boyishness of it was in fact very captivating. But I guessed that as soon as the comet passed it was forgotten.

Epstein took me with him to see Caley Robinson, who had a floor in a palace on the Quai Bourbon. Robinson showed some of his work, and I was struck with the deference he paid to Epstein's opinion. For Robinson was an established artist, and Epstein was a boy.

In fact, he had not long before left the Beaux Arts, and when I posed there they still talked of the great fight he had had with a bullying student. The student bullied no more. And yet I don't suppose he had made Epstein angry. He had just been a nuisance, and Epstein had swept him out of his way.

Thus with a gamin who jeered as we passed in the street! Epstein picked up something ponderable

from the gutter and heaved it at the boy. The boy fled, and Epstein walked on unperturbed.

I had no doubt that he was a genius. I found it thrilling to watch the growth of his figures, and at that time there was nothing (from my point of view) monstrous about them except the hands—he believed in big hands. But the figures were lyrical, and went to the old tune.

He knew what he wanted. He had a clear idea of the function, one might almost call it the mission, of the sculptor. It was to sculpture gods. Bric-à-brac didn't interest him. And his gods must be architectural, the model must obey the laws of architectural design. Perhaps he had visions of a temple, though he has had to be content with the British Medical over Dunn's Hat-shop, the offices of the Chemical Combine and the Underground.

In fact, if he has gone wrong, it is because he never found his temple, and so his figures, which would have been restrained and conditioned by the mass they sprang from or supported, have become anarchistically insurgent. It may be so. This is not a criticism of Epstein's work; I want to give you an idea of the man.

When I was working as a journalist in London, I went to see Epstein in the most casually thrown together of studios at Stamford Bridge. He was living on a small yearly scholarship or something awarded by a Jewish society. He was married by then to the great woman who has been his prime support throughout his career.

He had not changed. I think he could not change. Still as ever he lived in his work. But his marriage had given him a little local world in which to relax and recreate. He allowed himself to be looked after, and it suited him—and her.

When next I had word from him he was living in Cheyne Walk. He had the order for the British Medical freize, and he wanted me to pose for him. I went down, and found a fine comfortable flat above

the handsome studio. He was no longer slim. But he was as vigorous as ever, and I supposed that the comfort suited him.

He said that this was going to be a difficult job, because the figures would be so high up, and Agar Street was so narrow. Of course he was going to do the figures in the stone, for Epstein is a sculptor, not a mere modeller.

He had become more human when at work, if that was a good sign, and was no longer so impatient about the *rests* for the model. But the zealot, the devotee, the demoniac remained.

I don't remember when it was he took me to see the Cave of the Golden Calf. I think Madame Strindberg ran it; it was in or near Regent Street. There was a lot of carving in wood about the place, and he asked me what I thought of it. Having not the faintest idea whose work it was, I said I thought it was dreadful. Tears came into his eyes, and he said that he had done it.

Make no mistake about it! (And nobody who is interested in the arts will make the mistake.) There is not the slightest hint of the charlatan about Epstein. He is sincere to the marrow; he does not decide what he wants to do; he is driven to do it.

You may not like *Rima*, *Night and Day*, and the rest of his recent work. But you must know, or be told, that they are the forthright work of a sincere artist, of a genius.

Of recent years I have met him only casually in the street, as roughly carelessly dressed as ever, using his eyes as he always used them, and as plainly possessed by a vision.

He is not an old man yet, he is always giving us fresh surprises, and it is possible that he may swing round again to what I consider the normal tradition of European sculpture.

It is a mistake to think that he does not consider tradition; only the tradition he considers is mainly not

European, is non-Christian. He tired of the pretty-pretty of the Greeks, and went back to the Egyptians. He has gone back farther than that. His work is barbarian, and yet modern. Well, the modern world is barbarian. So that perhaps Epstein is representative of his generation.

Well, anyhow, his work never looks, as does some modern work, like evil things pushing out of the primordial slime.

A true sculptor, with a love and understanding for all his materials, with a love and understanding for the magic of mass and form, and inspired always by that dream of his—to sculpture gods. If he had found his temple, I think they would not have remained what they are—idols.

## IX

### HANNEN SWAFFER

HANNEN SWAFFER is a legend. I don't know that I can make him much more real than that. I have known him for a generation, I worked with him in the same office for several years, seeing him every day, and I have never penetrated behind the mask.

When first I came to know him well, he was fresh from the service of the CHIEF—Alfred Harmsworth, Lord Northcliffe, but for some time said little about him.

Later it appeared that Swaffer had adored the Chief as the greatest man God ev-er m-made. But at the moment he may have been sore to think that he and the Chief were parted. Harmsworth had called Swaff "the poet"—merely because Swaffer wore his hair long. I think that must have been characteristic of the Chief.

Swaffer came to us on the *Daily Sketch* to wake things up. We knew that he was a *live wire*, and we wondered what dreadful things he would do on the *Sketch*.

I am certain that he was engaged in order to do dreadful things, to go as near the limit of decency and the law of libel as possible, and that from this point of view he was a grievous disappointment.

For he did nothing dreadful, though he did wake things up.

Nobody seemed to know what was his position. Jimmy Heddle was head-cook-and-bottle-washer under Edward Hulton, yet somehow Swaff did not seem to be under Jimmy. He seemed at times to be News Editor. He seemed at times to be picture-editor.

I don't know that it will interest you lay readers—and yet it may. The ordinary *art* or picture-editor of a newspaper prepares his page of photos with meticulous care, measuring them this way and that way to the sixteenth of an inch, with a skeleton dummy of the page to see that the photos will balance.

But Swaff did none of these things. He took a lot of photos which he had selected, by sleight of hand from a hundred, juggled with them, dealt them as if he were playing cards, folded back the edges, wrote something on the back, and cried: "Boy!" The page was done.

When you saw a pull of it, you found that, not only did the photos balance mechanically, but they harmonised in subject—the whole page meant something, meant one thing.

To my mind the art of photography is responsible for two unique phenomena—Charlie Chaplin on the silent films, and Hannen Swaffer as picture-editor.

But he did much more than that. I was the leader-writer. I used to sign my stuff: *The Man in the Street*. It was a popular feature.

Now when Swaffer met me in the office—I think, but I'm not sure, that it was after we'd moved from the Tudor Street rabbit-warren to the *public-baths and wash-houses* of Shoe Lane—when we met he said: "Fancy seeing you in a newspaper office," and let out that funny whinnying giggle which lit the lamps in the face of god Pan.

You see, he had the notion that I was only to be met with in the offices of newspapers which sought the higher life and the smaller circulation.

I suppose that he read my leaders and decided that something might be made of them. For a week or so later he took me into a secret place and showed me a great book. "These," he said, "are the leaders of the best paid journalist in the world" (and he mentioned his name). "S-study them. F-find out what makes them worth while!" And then he left me.

Well, I studied the leaders of the best paid journalist in the world—of course an American—and decided that they were dreadful tripe. What was Swaff up to? Could he really want me to write like this?

I came to the conclusion that he believed in magic, and thought that somehow my work would be improved if I touched the leaders of the best paid journalist in the world.

Which reminds me that years afterwards when I had given up my chair to T. W. H. Crosland and was doing the drama for the *Sunday Herald* in another room of the wash-houses, the great old man crawled in like a leaning tower, and said: "Titterton, Jimmy Heddle has just told me to turn up your leaders on the file and try to imitate you." And he stood there with his jaw thrust out—a flaming fury.

"Has he, T.W.H.?" I said. "Well, I do hope you won't try."

At that the old man exploded. I thought he was going to strike me. Instead of that, he put his arm through mine, drew me up, and said: "Come and have a drink!"

To return to Swaff. You will observe that he had not asked me to imitate the best paid journalist in the world.

There is no doubt that I profited by what Swaff told me about journalism. He did know. He showed me the need to be right on the moment—or a tick in front of it. He showed me how to disentangle the real news from the whirligig of the time, and print that.

"A newspaper, my boy," he told me and everybody else, "a newspaper p-prints news. If you've anything else pretty to sell, t-take it to M-madame Tussaud's or the 'N-nation.' This is a n-newspaper."

"Don't be a silly fool," he said to a reporter whom he'd sent out on a *story*, and who had come back to say there was no news in it. "News, you ch-chump? There's news in a bundle of firewood." And he'd prove to you that there was.

Indeed he had a marvellous sense of news values. He tingled with the consciousness of journalism in every fibre. And he was on duty all the time that he was awake. He would bring out from about him a copy of the early edition of the paper, and remark with pious awe : "That paper will be to-morrow morning on a million breakfast-tables." But there his news sense was at fault, for it was only the Irish edition.

Big circulations fascinated him, as did the big salary of the best paid journalist in the world. Milton was a p-poor mutt. He only got Five Pounds for "P-paradise Lost," and what the hell was his circulation?

Sometimes I would meet him up west, and he would approve my perambulation. It was a maxim of his that a journalist should have no home-life. He seemed to feel that news was happening all the time, and that it was a crime to miss it.

I think he took some pains with me—perhaps he took pains with everybody who seemed a possible journalist, perhaps he exuded journalism as a saint does sanctity. Certainly he found me a literary-man, writing for the Press, and left me a journalist.

What he may have feared was the fact, however. He did not succeed in excising my professional scruples. *He* had none. It seemed to him sheer lunacy to have any in journalism. You got the news—whatever it was—and then you printed it. If you didn't take that line you were false to your calling.

Years later I recalled this period to him. "Yes," he said, in a matter-of-fact way, "I inv-vented you." I am inclined to think this is an exaggeration.

He was a fine man to work with, he so loved the work. Every detail of it meant everything to him. And while you were with him it did seem a tremendous thing that the story you got would be on a million breakfast-tables in the morning.

On several occasions he saved me from the sack. The word had come from Hulton—or at least it came from Jimmy Heddle, and *he* said it came from Hulton

—that I was getting too hot, and that I must respect persons and keep my hands off institutions—or I must go.

And Swaff, in his shirt-sleeves, as he always was when at work, would sit on the hinder end of Jimmy's vast desk, and say: "Jimmy, what is it that the public wants?"

As Jimmy had been trying to find this out all his life, and wasn't yet quite sure, he said nothing, but smiled up at Swaff in his cock-sparrow, well-pumice-stoned way.

"The t-truth, Jimmy!" Swaff went on. "And what is it that none of the papers'll give them? The t-truth!"

He'd get off the desk with a giggly laugh, shake a sheaf of proofs in the air, and cry:

"Jimmy, let's sell 'em the truth!"—and then in a conversational tone to me: "That's all right, Tit, old man, you g-give the b-bastards hell."

Of a surety Swaff invented the Gossip columns in the *Sketch*, and made me the first gossip-monger—heaven knows why, except that the gossip came on the same page as the leader.

All the good that I did was to invent the signature: *Mr. Gossip*, which I think was a notion. But, after giving a mild boost to all my friends, I resigned, having decided that I had not a mind to snuff and pry. I told Swaff, and so lost his good opinion for ever.

There is no doubt that Swaff, plus the gossip—when Peter Page came to do it—and the Man in the Street established the *Daily Sketch* in London. Equally is there no doubt that Swaff had the biggest hand in it.

But almost as soon as the paper was established Swaff left. He was out on a story—a racecourse story, I think, and phoned or wired some news about a man which, as it was printed, was untrue. I did not trouble to get the details, because I knew really what had happened. Swaff was paid to go as near the line as pos-

sible; he slipped just over the line, and they sacked him.

My next encounters with Swaff were at theatres. It is strange to reflect that when I first knew him he was not a theatrical journalist. And he seemed to become so by sitting talking to managers and Press agents and asking them what they knew. Of course he must often have been in the auditorium on a first-night, but it happens that I don't remember seeing him there. I remember him best sitting with his big felt hat tilted forward over his face and his face expressing all the gloom of the lower depths. I think that as I watch I am reflecting that he is growing very rude and rather decorative—when first we met he was merely regardless and untidy.

But I think that he devoted himself seriously to the self-decorative arts and decided to be really rude, though only in print, when he went on the water-wagon. Which he did, for good and all, quite suddenly.

It was on the *Daily Graphic* that he finally found his true niche as gossip-monger. His column, signed *Mr. London*, was great stuff; it did really give you a mirror of the times. He left it to become an editor again—of the *People*. And the queer thing is that he recommended me to Tibbett, the editor of the *Graphic*, as the next best man in London for the gossip job.

My first idea was that he was making sure that the column would be worse after he left it. But I knew all the time that this was unjust to Swaff. For one thing, he was sure as death that nobody in London could do a gossip-column half as well as he could. For another, he would have hated to see his old column done badly. No, it was just a blind spot.

Of course he made the *People* talked about. But in my opinion he is not a good editor. He bubbles with ideas, he sees men as columns walking, he can strike news out of the rock; but he needs control.

I went to see him every week at the *People* office, for at that time I was a theatrical Press agent, touting for space.

Every time I went in Swaff would offer a negligent hand, say in a tired voice: "Hallo, old man!" and then, more briskly: "W-what d'ye know?"

He had become splendidly decorative, it was now a very careful disorder, the locks were nicely wayward, the god Pan was pontifically austere. He had, what I had never noticed in the old days, an air of being always on view. Possibly he had found that Swaff, treated thus, was a selling proposition. I don't know; but I do know that he enjoyed himself.

His Jewish secretary, when she wasn't tapping away at 150 a minute, looked at him half in amusement and half in adoration.

It was about this time that he became a Spiritualist; and I fear that I may have been indirectly responsible.

A number of journalists, with Mrs. Cecil Chesterton at their head, got up an affair called the "Peasant Players of Fleet Street" for the production of impromptu plays. You know: the plot is premeditated, the dialogue occurs. We produced only one play—"Saint Vanglia, or the Witch of Fleet Street." But that was a masterpiece.

Well, I went round trying to get some free publicity in the Press, because we had the idea that we should play better with an audience. And in my round I called on Swaff.

The idea tickled him; he neighed with joy, he said: "M-miss Goldberg, take this down," and dictated a stupendous par., getting additional facts *en passant*, as his custom was. At one moment when Miss Goldberg was looking up brightly for more, Swaff said: "Wha-what part are you playing?"

"The ghost of Northcliffe," said I.

"B-by Jove!" said Swaff, "the ghost of Northcliffe! Where did I leave off? Oh, yes!" And continued.

A few weeks later he saw the ghost of Northcliffe, or anyhow spoke to it.

Swaff left the *People* shortly after he had published an interview with Mr. Stanley Baldwin. Baldwin repudiated the interview.

When Swaff had got the sack, he retired to the Savoy Hotel, and sent round word to everybody. We came flocking, yes, we did. Swaff worked the oracle all right; obviously his dismissal was a national calamity.

He was proposing to edit—for the moment—the tiniest of tiny papers—a sort of London *What's On*—when he got the shop on the *Daily Express*.

He did what he liked on the *Express*—putting gossip in the criticism and criticism in the gossip as he chose, but he always gave the public the *news*. And he was always readable. I think this is a fair parody of his style; given as I have heard it dictated, with Swaff in his shirt-sleeves, a cigarette in the far corner of his mouth :

“Are you read-dy, Miss Goldberg? I’ll have three carbon copies, please. Last n-night, at the V-vaudeville Theatre, I witnessed the first and p-probably the last performance of a new comedy. In the s-s-stalls in front of me I saw Miss Gladys Cooper and Mr. Noel Coward; they seemed as b-bored with each other as they were with the play. During the interval I met Mr. Al. Woods; he told me he had bought the film rights in the creation for twenty million dollars. I told him he’d been done. After the show I met Mr. Gordon Selfridge in the *foyer* f-o-y-e-r—underline it, it’s F-french. He said to me: ‘Swaff, old man, w-what did ye think of the play?’ I said: ‘I thought it was b-b—awful.’ He said: ‘Swaff, old man, I always knew you were the best critic in Europe.’ I said: ‘Why the hell do you leave out America?’ The receipts last night were £143 14s. 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. If they are rash enough to put it on to-night, you can leave out the p-p-p-pounds.”

And Miss Goldberg left out the b-b—

Swaff was indeed a personage during those few years, the most vital, the most arresting figure in the theatre. I think that he was a poor critic. But he made everybody talk about him. And he made everybody read him.

He was hated, oh, yes. Many a theatrical manager would gladly have poisoned his barley-water, if it could have been done without danger to the manager's wind and limb. And there were actors and actresses—well, one little actress slapped his face, and Swaff had it illustrated, wrote a caption in doggerel, and sent the result, printed, round the town as a Christmas card. My reply, put into the mouth of the actress, an American, ran thus :

“ Say, but you've got the nerve  
To play the mild and meek  
When slappings only serve  
To swell your blooming cheek.”

Mind you, I think that he saw himself as a devoted champion of the truth, while all the other critics were grovelling at the feet of the managers and the stars. I think that from those early times Swaff's picture of himself had been as Truth's Champion. I think he was always waving an intellectual Red Flag inside himself when he was drinking champagne at the Savoy.

And often he has come to see my manager at the theatre, and, as he waited and talked to me of that person, perhaps a millionaire, it was clear that he saw himself as a fiery prophet denouncing the cities of the plain.

Towards the end I think he took a pride in damning plays. Certainly he seemed to take a pride in damning the plays of Noel Coward. (But then he took pride in all that he did.) When he damned “Sirocco” it seemed that Coward's career as a playwright was done. Coward went back to his acting, and swore that they

had seen his last play. Do you remember the pretty encounter between the two of them after Coward had made a hit in "The Second Man" at the Playhouse? Says Swaff, rubbing it in before an audience: "Hallo, Noel! I hope y'didn't mind my saying you're better as an actor than a writer." Coward gave a small smile and a small bow. "My dear Swaffer," he replied, "I always thought the same of you."

And we might think the same. For indeed by this time Hannen Swaffer was a very perfect work of art—the big felt always tilted at the right angle, so as to shadow, but not too much, that lank, sardonic profile—yes, strangely enough, it was usually in profile that you saw him—the gait that never hurried. The pose that kept him aloof and, as it were, upon his pedestal. Though a very busy journalist, he always gave you the impression of sauntering into view and meeting you and your news by accident. Whatever the news you had to tell him, the most important news was that Hannen Swaffer had arrived.

Was this conscious self-advertisement—as of course it had been at the beginning—for the purpose of marketing his journalism? Or had the pose worked into his fibre so that now he did in his heart believe himself the greatest man in the world? Frankly, I don't know. To say that I have seen him take the oracular pose when the audience was quite inconsiderable proves nothing. For if you are in that line of business you must never be caught napping, you must always be in the shop—or rather, in the shop-window.

All I can say is that I have seen this remarkable figure in process of growth from the merely careless untidy journalist of twenty years ago, and as a *pièce de vertu* I find it admirable. If its purpose were to capture the market, it has been highly effective. In my generation no journalist has been so much talked about—anyhow in Fleet Street and the West End—and I fancy that his fame had a wider orbit. I

am sure that this could not have been achieved without faith.

But, you may say, if it be merely faith in himself, that is not very admirable. Well, I cannot follow you there. If I accept the phrase "faith in himself" it is because it may be very wide in its application.

At the beginning, you see, he had great faith in himself as a journalist. He *knew* that of this craft he was a master. He was ruthless, and he acknowledged it. The only sort of journalism he knew must be ruthless. And, mark you, that is the sort of journalism accepted by all the popular papers, only they lack the intellectual courage of Hennen Swaffer.

But where I began to sense a queerness was in regard to the content of the staff—in terms of opinion, of point or view, and ultimately of something like belief. When most of his copy consisted in news of the deals of shabby theatrical speculators or of the private lives of public performers, he regarded himself as preacher and prophet. And, to my immense astonishment, after the death of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, he was accepted as high-priest and prophet by the English Spiritualists.

And then I thought back. I remembered that he had always been proud of certain polemical achievements. He used to say: "When I die, I want them to put on my tombstone: 'He made it more difficult for a man to have a woman, and easier for a woman to have a child'." Which meant that he had helped to close the Empire Music-Hall Promenade, and to popularise Twilight Sleep.

He was proud, too, of having stopped black-versus-white boxing in England (it is beginning again now) by getting the Johnson-Wells fight banned, and of having opposed the staging of negro revues in 1923. He regarded himself, moreover, as the stern opponent of indecent plays.

A very modern reformer! It was not easy to recognise this at first, for in a newspaper office he is so com-

pletely the journalist. But after a while it became clear to me that Swaff was a Socialist and was opposed to tradition in all sorts of ways.

In fact, and whatever his nominal opinions may be, this is what he is : an anarchist, an outlaw. While he was yet the dramatic critic of the *Daily Express* there were quite a number of West End managers who refused to have him within their doors. That amused him. He felt himself invulnerable.

And now, for the first time in his life, he is on a Socialist paper—the *Daily Herald*—with a bigger salary than he ever had before. But, though the *Herald* has a great circulation, I don't think it is Swaffer's circulation. For, revolutionary though he may have been, his world has been the world of theatres and racecourses and the Savoy grill-room.

I think he must feel a little out of it. During the General Election of November, 1931, he spoke for Labour candidates. I wish I had heard him; it must have been queer. Though indeed the things he knew about "M-my friend Jimmy White," and "M-my friend Solly Joel" would be useful hustings-ammunition. But Swaff in bloom on the platform with a bevy of crude Labour men must have been queer indeed.

He still writes Gossip, and he still gets the news. It is possible, perhaps I may say probable, that on the *Herald* he will get his finest opportunity and do his best work. But as the great Panjandrum of the theatre his day is past—unless he returns to a "capitalist" paper.

Unless and until when, he will no longer be able to say casually : "I t-told Cochran what was wrong with the show; he's putting it right at the matinee"; or "I g-give it two weeks; I shall say so in my paper," or "I was passing the *Vaudeville* just now, and saw that the posters were all wrong; I went in and told them."

In a way it's a pity. He *was*—well, he still is, a most impressive figure, the most impressive figure Fleet Street and the West End have known since

Randal Charlton ceased to brood over us with his six feet odd of Regency Buck.

I don't suppose he has done much lasting harm. The Empire Promenade would have been closed and Twilight Sleep would have been, for a while, popular had Swaff never existed.

He is a fine figure. And he is useful to have about, for he is a pure type of modern journalist. He differs from a thousand other journalists by being far more competent and altogether without fear.

Incidentally, it took some pluck so far to conquer the terrible stutter he had as a child that he became one of the best public speakers of our time at theatrical debating societies and, especially, at public dinners.

In fact, I think you see Swaff at his best as he stands at the dinner table and with sepulchral gloom and nice deliberation tells a very funny story about his friend Nellie Wallace or his friend Lord Lonsdale. Then a faint aura of geniality seems to hover over that austere profile, and the cold eye seems almost to wink.

## X

### JOHN BURNS

WHEN I was a young fellow John Burns was as well-known as any man in England. But there were many who were better loved. This was not because he was unlovable. I have come to the conclusion now that he was a very lovable fellow indeed. But he, who had been a revolutionary Socialist, had settled down to the hard grind of administration and reform. His old enemies didn't love him any the better for that, and his old friends, who were still shouting and waving banners, hated him. I was one of those who shouted and waved banners.

He was loved in Battersea, and he was respected at Spring Gardens.

Battersea knew how much he had done for her and what pride he had in her. So that, touchy as he was, he did not quite resent the cry that went after him down the street: "There goes the Battersea Cauf-drop."

Spring Gardens knew what a wise and zealous London County Councillor he was:—not content to attend and vote at committee and council meetings, but running round Battersea, yes, and all London, seeing things for himself. Not content to make acquaintance with Council-officers across a committee-room table, but nosing them out of their nooks and crannies in that queer congeries of rooms between the Mall and Cockspur Street (nicknamed the County Hall), and going step by step with them through their work.

He was thought a nuisance at times, no doubt. But

he never came on a fool's errand. And he did get things done.

It was in a nook of the Council Buildings in Spring Gardens that I first met him. He burst in on my chief, Hart Bennett (Main Drainage Engineer for the South Side of the River), foaming with papers and wrath and the vehement declaration that some confounded sewer ventilator in Battersea was stinking like hell.

But Hart Bennett and he liked each other, and they were soon laughing and joking. Each man knew his job, and knew that the other did.

They were utter contrasts. Bennett was a dear crusted old Tory, who took his wine for lunch, and mellowed into anecdote of an afternoon when he wasn't out on the *System* or the works. It was a nice study in extremes—that-meet to see the cosy, punctilious old gentleman fencing with bluff and bearded John in his bowler hat and reefer jacket. Of course the bowler hat came off, and you saw the obstinate cropped hair, already going grey.

"You would think," said Bennett with a smile when Burns had gone, "that he knew every inch of drainpipe in the system."

"Crawled down it, sir," said I.

"He has," said Bennett gravely, and began to dictate to me with an air of chill reproof. For after all Mr. Burns was one of our employers. I caught the reproof, and liked John none the better for it. As I made my shorthand notes I allowed my mind to dwell on the fact that Burns had deserted the revolution, for which I worked in a very desultory fashion in my spare time.

Sometimes I went down to Committee. It was good to see John at work there. Almost always he would be busy with papers. The usual committee rigmarole went on over his head. He read and pencilled on. Then, when something of more importance was being decided—perhaps already the members had mur-

mured "Agreed!" he'd raise his head with a jerk, and make one or two quick remarks. "Yes, of course, that alters the case," the Chairman would say, and the Committee would reverse its decision.

But what made it hardest to maintain my revolutionist's hatred of John was his casual friendly ways. He had a memory for faces, and a word and a smile for the most junior clerk when he met him in the passages. And once at least I remember—it was in Aldgate then, but I think there was another occasion in Farringdon Street—that I felt a hand on my shoulder as I stooped over the second-hand books on the street-stalls, and heard John's big voice saying: "Well, what treasure have you got there?"

What wonderful eyes he had, when they lighted up over his trim strong beard.

Yes, I ought to have liked him. But young enthusiasts are very inhuman. And I couldn't forget that while Phil Snowden and Ben Tillett and Tom Mann and Kier Hardie and Robert Blatchford were fighting in the ranks of the oppressed, Burns was working cheek by jowl with cap-pitalists on the merest palliatives. And that was the man who had won the great Dock Strike, and fought the police in Trafalgar Square on Bloody Sunday! No I wasn't going to forgive him, and now it is for him to forgive me—if he will.

I came nearest to liking him during the pro-Boer riots. The old fiery John came out then with a vengeance. It was a treat to hear him expose the ramp, and scourge the South African mine-owners for whom British soldiers were dying. But I hadn't often the chance to hear him.

There was a gang of us that formed a Peace Guard. We went round to pro-Boer meetings to protect the speakers and, where possible, secure them a hearing. We had a war-song. It ran thus:

We're the enemies of war and bloodshed.  
And none shall make us afraid.

If they venture to oppose,  
We'll dot 'em on the nose.

We're the boys of the Peace Brigade.

At the beginning we had a rough time. I shall always believe that a majority of British people were against the Boer War, just as the vast majority of us were vehemently for the war with Germany. But most of the pro-Boers kept quiet. And the hooligans came to our meetings in full force.

The open-air meetings were the worst, and one of the worst of them was a meeting we had in Victoria Park. A minor incident of that was that I was hit over the eye with a knuckleduster.

It came up beautiful. For a week I was blind in one eye.

So, since the punishment for participation in such unclerklike games would be the sack, I wrote to Spring Gardens naming another game, cricket, as the cause of the bunged-up eye. And when I was back in the office, John Burns almost blew the gaff.

I was working with Hart Bennett when John burst in. He looked at me, saw the rainbow tints which decorated my face, and asked what I'd been doing with my eye.

"Cricket-match, Mr. Burns," I said, and gave him a warning wink.

"Ho, ho," said he, bursting into a roar. "I've been to a good many of those cricket-matches myself lately."

Hart Bennett looked at me thoughtfully. His lips twitched. Then he turned to John Burns, and plunged into main drainage.

I think that in the end I might have come to like John. But after the great Liberal victory of 1906 he joined the Liberal Government. And that was the end of everything. The fun of it is that I think I'm

a Liberal myself now, only there's not the least trace of a Liberal Party.

But I had the idea, too, that it was a capital crime for a Socialist to become a member of a capitalist government, whatever it called itself. I regarded any government as capitalist which was not the mouthpiece of a Socialist majority in the House and in the country.

I contended that a Socialist member of a capitalist cabinet would be forced to do things, or at best to acquiesce in the doing of things entirely repugnant to the Socialist ideal. To come to particulars, I thought that the presence of Burns in the Liberal cabinet would help to "content the fools of workmen with their chains," and so delay the coming of the Bloody Revolution. Which was due in the Spring.

So that for me and very many other Socialists, John Burns, working with fierce energy and zeal at the Local Government Board, was a traitor to his class—to which I did not belong—and his creed—which a few years after I abandoned.

And then I despised John for his vanity. Strange to say, I was not yet aware that I was an extraordinarily vain person myself. Nor did I realise that a public man who is not vain—that is, proud to please his fellows—will almost certainly be conceited—that is, proud of himself and contemptuous of his fellows. I did not realise that often, as in John, vanity is a human failing, is even a sign of humility; while conceit is almost always an inhuman vice. The typical democrat and the typical king are vain; the typical oligarch and the typical bureaucrat are conceited.

I don't think that I believed that John had sold himself for the fleshpots. When a comrade accused him of that I retorted: "No, Burns hasn't sold himself, he's let himself out on lease," and I knew that even this *mot* was more *bon* than *juste*.

But I did think that John was a colossal lump of vanity, and that he could work as he did, day in day

out, for the sake of the running commentary on the tin trumpet of fame.

I was peculiarly annoyed by the frequent Press paragraphs about how John had helped an old lady or a small child across Whitehall. So one evening a friend of mine who shared my feelings concocted in my presence a letter to the *Daily News*.

I have not at the moment a copy of the letter before me, but I may get one in time to print it in the appendix. The gist of the geste was that the story of how the President of the Local Government Board had helped a child (or an old lady) across Whitehall reminded the correspondent of an incident in the great Dock Strike. John Burns was speaking from a rostrum outside the Blackwall Dock Gates to a crowd of strikers when one of the men interrupted him with the remark: "That's all very well, John, but what about our stomachs?" Whereupon Mr. Burns took off his celebrated bowler, and produced from the crown of it a string of steaming sausages, which he distributed with the remark: "It's the seasoning as does it." Ben Tillett, who was present, observed: "Well, I'll be damned."

This letter appeared in the *Daily News*, minus the last sentence, but with a gap between the body of the text and the signature showing that a line had been lifted out on the Stone. And the anecdote, invented by my friend in my presence, appears in the "Life of John Burns" by George Haw, who was with me on the *Daily News*. It seemed to me just like John to let this absurd story pass unchallenged. Well, it was just like him, but not in the way I meant.

Then again, now that I no longer agreed with what he said—I was ceasing to be a Socialist, but remaining a revolutionary—I grew to hate his platform manner. Of course he played to the gallery. Every orator does, whether with the revivalist Welsh fervour of Mr. Lloyd George or the caustic blarney of Mr. Bernard Shaw. But I thought that John was just a

bubble of vanity dancing ecstatically on the breath of applause. Whereas he was merely more innocent than the Irishman and more honest than the Welshman. His naïve delight at pleasing people should have disarmed me. Instead, it infuriated me.

The climax came when I was detailed by the *Daily News* to follow him round on a General Election Day. He went from Committee Room to Committee Room in his constituency, and I followed him in another taxi. I hated the job. And, viewing his proceedings with a jaundiced eye, I decided that they were all swank, a cheap publicity stunt. Whereas the dear old child, released from his office grind for a day, was enjoying himself innocently in his favourite rôle.

Having delivered my copy, I waited for the declaration of the poll. From the Town Hall to the houses opposite the place was wedged tight with a roaring mob. When the Mayor came out on a balcony to announce the result his voice was inaudible. But he exhibited the election figures on a placard, and he waved his hand at John. Then the impossible happened: the noise increased. And then John spoke. That is, his mouth moved. And he capered. He was possessed by the crowd, and he possessed us. Yes, jibing cynically to myself the while, I too was possessed.

Then I saw the crowd frothing before a door of the Town Hall, and suddenly John was among us, borne aloft on a stretcher held by four supporters. We all shouted, we were one huge mouth. And he shouted too, though we could not hear him. His eyes were shining, his fine strong face was aflame with joy. So, like the god of our cult, he passed through us, above us—was gone. And the madness left me.

I went home sick and savage with myself. I had been mob-mad many a time before. And in the pro-Boer riots I had fought the mob. But this time I had been captured against my will; and I cursed the enchanter. I did not reflect that this man, who

wielded such enormous power, had never used it for evil purposes, and remained simple John Burns slaving in a government office and finding thrills in his scant leisure in the society of great books. He was a demagogue, a beguiler of the people, I told myself; and I hated him.

So, when the chance came, I wrote an article in *P.I.P.* *showing him up*. It was an ungenerous article. It was dishonest, because I left out things which would have told in his favour so that I might make my case, which, however, I believed to be a true bill.

The article made Burns very angry. I was in the National Liberal Club with some friends when John Burns came over to talk. He recognised my face, but I don't suppose that he recalled my name, for he was very friendly. This I couldn't stand: it made me feel a worm. So I said I hoped he didn't mind that article.

At that John turned on me, and rent me in shreds. If he'd been a younger man, he said, he'd have had me down in the yard with our coats off. I sat facing his fury, and trying hard to smile.

He ended the onslaught abruptly, and said in a quiet fatherly way: "Young man, if you live to be as old as I am, you'll regret it."

Well, John, I regret it already.

The best thing in John Burns's public life was the way he left it. He was a member of Asquith's cabinet in August, 1914. As Mr. Lloyd George was at the outset, and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was to the end, he was against the War. But he did not imitate either of these two gentlemen in what he did. Without fuss this man whom I had thought a bundle of vanity resigned his office, and vanished from the public eye.

I believe that he did good work for the nation during the War in an unobtrusive civilian capacity.

It was astonishing. I saw plainly that I had altogether misunderstood him, that inside these joyous foibles of his, the integrity of John Burns had remained impregnable.

Since the War there have been rumours from time to time that Burns was coming back. But he has remained secluded and silent. There has been something very powerful and yet pathetic in the silence of John Burns.

He has seen Mr. Saklatvala sit for Battersea. I wonder how he liked that. He has watched the twisted growth of the modern world. I wonder what he thinks of that. Yes, I should very much like to ask this Victorian democrat what he thinks of the modern world.

## XI

### JOHN DRINKWATER

I FIRST came in touch with Drinkwater when I was assistant editor of the *New Witness*. He used to send me up sets of verses, verses perfectly sculptured, and with the country life in every gesture. I thought them somewhat cold, aloof. But that was their quality, not their fault.

One day he came to see me. A tall lean fellow with a quiet eye. I found him, like his verses, a little cold, aloof.

We corresponded occasionally, and once he wrote to say that my meagre payment was a poor pennyworth. Then I lost sight of him, until he blazed into fame with "Abraham Lincoln" at the Lyric, Hammersmith.

You know what a great reception the play had; but it puzzled me. No doubt it had a dogged strength, the scenes were vivid, the interludes of verse were noble and spacious. But Lincoln himself was all wrong. Partly that may have been because the rôle was filled by an actor with a strong Irish accent who played with a bent ramrod down his back. But surely it was Drinkwater's fault that Lincoln of the play had no sense of humour, and had been turned into a stiff Puritan very like the playwright himself.

And, by Jove, I was right. For the rascal did the same with "Robert E. Lee." I decided that I knew my Drinkwater, and was thankful that Shaw had written "Saint Joan" to save her from J.D.

Then I went to "Bird in Hand," and saw Drinkwater standing in the box-office. At least he saw and greeted me; for at first I did not recognise him. He

had filled out, the face was round and joyous, and the eye was as bright as a bird's. Though there was still a slow, measured sedateness about him, the man was transfigured. So that in some degree I was prepared for the play.

Humour? It was full of it. *S'—ess?* There was none. Nor any touch of the Puritan. It was a country frolic as authentic as any folk-tale, and as merry.

Were all those other admired plays the expression of something acquired, and was this the real Drinkwater? That is what I concluded. But the shame of it is that since then we have had no other "*Bird in Hand.*"

"You'll find my new place in Highgate Village difficult to get at. I'll meet you in town, and take you up by car."

I met him and Mrs. Drinkwater in town, and we found his place difficult to get at. For there were fittings to be chosen for the new house, and then there was a blockage of London traffic.

However, at last we were at the top of the world—in the Grove.

"After all," said Drinkwater, gazing sedately at London fuming in the valley, "this is the only part of London to live in."

Having lived there, and moved away, for reasons not unconnected with house-accommodation, I agreed heartily. And when I looked across his lawn, his park—tree-shaded—at the blue and green perspective of Ken Wood, I did not wonder that Miss Gladys Cooper lived only three doors away.

Drinkwater brought into the library with him a parcel he had found waiting for him in the hall. He asked me to forgive him; he had always a devouring curiosity to see what was in a parcel; and opened it.

It was a small silver cup, inscribed for a victory.

DRINKWATER. "Isn't that charming? This is the story of it. You must know that I'm very fond of tennis, used to play in fairly good—oh, second-class matches. Don't do so much nowadays. But when I was at Gerald du Maurier's the other day we had a foursome. Mary Newcomb and I against Angela du Maurier and Bunny Austin—the crack player, you know."

(I nodded.)

DRINKWATER. "And the fun of it is that we won. Eight to six."

W.R.T. "That was historic."

DRINKWATER. "Oh, of course Austin was playing holiday tennis. But anyhow—well, anyhow we won. I was bucked. That sort of thing matters a good deal to me. And I said to Mary: 'I'll send you a cup if you send me one.' This is hers. I must hurry up with mine."

W.R.T. "Were you fond of games when you were a boy?"

DRINKWATER. "Devoted to them. And even now I cherish in my heart the illusion that I'd rather play for England at soccer than . . ."

W.R.T. "Than for Shakespeare on the Elysian fields."

DRINKWATER. "I was a fairly good cricketer, but soccer went beyond that."

W.R.T. "The arts didn't catch you young?"

DRINKWATER. "No, I had an unspoiled youth."

W.R.T. "You were born in London?"

DRINKWATER. "On the outskirts. But I'm a Warwickshire boy. And I went to school in Oxford. When I left school I knew something of the country, and of literature nothing whatever. I'd learnt what a High School teaches—one play of Shakespeare a term forced down your throat with a ram-

rod. And I knew one or two names. But I had an idea that Shakespeare and Swinburne were contemporaries. That sort of thing."

W.R.T. "You had no intention of becoming a poet?"

DRINKWATER. "My only intention was to earn a living. You see my father, A. G. Drinkwater, had ruined himself taking Shaw's plays round the provinces. He was the first to do that. And when I went into an insurance office at Nottingham I had nothing but my own efforts to depend on."

W.R.T. "But you wrote."

DRINKWATER. "I began to write verses. Dreadful stuff."

W.R.T. "Are you sure?"

DRINKWATER. "Yes, I looked at them years later. You see I knew nothing. Even at the time I looked at them impatiently and saw that they were shockingly bad. So I stopped writing."

W.R.T. "When did you begin again?"

DRINKWATER. "I don't quite remember. The events of my life are my meeting with Barry Jackson and then the forming of our company of amateur actors in Birmingham. Suddenly I find myself writing poems and plays, and I find myself acting."

W.R.T. "Did you give up the Insurance to become a professional poet?"

DRINKWATER. "I have never been that. The professional poet always over-writes. A poem should always be the delight of a leisure hour. No, I became a man-of-the-theatre.

"You see our acting was none of your casual, turn-up-when-you-can affairs. We were hard at it every night and every weekend. And in the end, as playwright, producer, and actor, I found that it was an all-time job.

“ The change came about like this : Jackson put it to me that I was overworking (I hadn’t noticed) and that I ought to give up the Insurance. As you know, he is a rich man. His father planted the Maypole. And he said that he would put me on a retainer until the Birmingham Repertory Theatre was opened.

“ That was my hour of choice. Here was the primrose path of dalliance through an Insurance Office. There was the hard grind and sweat of writing, acting, and producing for the stage.”

W.R.T. (*smiling*). “ And, swallowing a lump in your throat, you bravely chose the stage.”

DRINKWATER. “ Oh, there was no credit to me in it. I liked the job. But the amusing thing is that I have lately met two men who were in the office with me, and they are now tremendous Insurance swells, making far more money than I shall ever make. But then I have never been attracted by the prospect of having lots of money.”

W.R.T. “ You were the first producer at the Birmingham Repertory ? ”

DRINKWATER. “ Yes. And for the time I did any old job that came along. Even taking money in the box-office. They were acting my plays, you know (the first of them were in verse) and I was acting myself. It was a wonderful life.”

W.R.T. “ Did the theatre have any effect upon your lyric verse ? ”

DRINKWATER. “ It impressed me with the importance of form. Poetry without form is void.”

W.R.T. “ And the need to find the word that fits brings to your mind the second, third, the ultimate word which is the best.”

DRINKWATER. “ That’s true.”

W.R.T. "Why did you turn to prose drama?"

DRINKWATER. "I felt that to-day the play in verse was an affectation. Verse is not now the natural language of the stage. And so in 'Abraham Lincoln' I sought for a kind of prose which kept some of the prime virtues of poetry."

W.R.T. "The coming of the play to London must have mattered to you."

DRINKWATER. "It mattered to my bank-book. But Birmingham made me what I am. I trust that Birmingham is pleased with its handi-work."

W.R.T. "Does verse still matter to you?"

DRINKWATER. "Oh, yes, very much. I don't now bring out one volume a year as I used to do. But I still write; I have enough for a new volume."

Just before I was going I saw the new baby. And it was clear that it mattered very much to Father John. But then that sort of thing matters to all of us.

Also he showed me an old coaching bill, advertising the setting forth of coaches from the inn of another John Drinkwater.

"I come," said Drinkwater, "of a family of inn-keepers. Desperately English folk. And that has meant as much to me as anything else."

And that, I think, explains him. He is not frigid. He is terribly reserved. Inside that cold exterior was always the jolly fire of "Bird in Hand," and much of his later verse burning. But he hated to give himself away.

He has still his repressions. But seeing him in his home, so happy and jolly with his wife and baby child, so boyish, I know that sooner or later he will give us another country comedy as English and merry as "Bird in Hand" and even more indubitably Drinkwater.

## XII

### H. M. TOMLINSON

ONE reason why I liked Harry Tomlinson when he was a young man and I was a lad was that he was ugly. For I was ugly too—and sensitive about it. I liked him as much for his eyes. They were kind, they were friendly, they were alive. When Tomlinson looked down at me with a humorous pucker of his full lips, his eyes seemed to say: “Wot larks!” But when he stood looking at nobody—just thinking—the eyes seemed sad.

He went to our chapel, and was active in it. Sunday School, prayer-meetings, Band of Hope. But that I took for granted. All the grown-men I knew except my schoolmasters were busy with chapel work. And Harry was just one of the corps. Though I thought him very much in earnest, I never suspected him of what revivalists call zeal. Well, he made no show of any of his emotions. The quiet ugly face, humorous when it looked at you, and those eyes were all the hint you got of the lots of thoughts you felt sure were working inside him.

He played football, for the chapel team, and then you saw that he was scraggy. I don’t think he played very well. But I’m sure that he enjoyed the game more than I did, who was always trying to shine. It was a quiet almost sombre enjoyment. That was the mood of the man. He might have been living an essay on the glory of being glum.

Only, everything he said was funny—really funny. Even his remarks on religion had a whimsical twist. Even when he spoke of the hopeless herding of the

poor, and that I knew stirred the depths, fun lightened the slow drawl of his muffled fury.

He saw something else in our riverside streets beside the squalor. Those eyes saw everything. I have never been observant, except of the few things and people that caught and held me; and many a time a stray remark of his about a familiar street and especially about the docks, the shipping, and the seamen showed me in a flash how much I had missed.

He began writing early, and . . . but here I'll let Harry speak for himself.

"I never regarded myself as a literary bloke, though I was always writing at school, and my stuff used to be read out to the class by the master.

"When I became an insurance agent for the Pru. . . . Lord, Willie, I've often thought what a rum sort of agent your father must have thought me. . . ." (My father was his superintendent.) "I went on writing, just as I went on playing games."

(Yes, he was a queer sort of agent. He seemed far more interested in the mere playing of the game than in scoring goals.)

"Going round canvassing was just the thing for a man like me, with more 'satisfiable' curiosity than the Elephant's Child. You might not get a proposal from every house—hark at me!—but I'm hanged if you wouldn't get a story.

"And where you and I were born and lived in the East End of London at the very gates of the docks there were many entrancing—and many tragic things. Well, you've seen them."

He looked at me solemnly, and for once there was no fun in the eyes.

"But so there are the world over—even in Mayfair; anyhow there are lots of squalid and tragic things in Mayfair."

"And the East End people are so real and so various," he went on, with the old whimsical ardour in

the eyes. "Mind you, all that junk about wild Chinese Nights is—well, junk. If East Enders have a fault, it is that they're so indecently respectable that the magic of every-day life wears a mask of dullness.

"Only, there's the docks. . . . Just over the wall they were from you, eh?"

W.R.T. "Yes, I could see the masts from the attic window."

He flashed his lamps at me without raising his head.

H.M.T. "I know, Willie. Well, as a child I used to slip into the docks and walk along those tantalising quays—you remember—and through those intoxicating warehouses rich with all the perfumes of the world.

"Smells. All sorts of marvellous smells. We're more like dogs than we know, Willie; and most of us think and feel through our noses.

"Those smells gave me visions of the Ultimate Islands, and by Jove there within hand-touch were the men and the ships setting out for them, or just come home. Plain magic! . . .

"Since then, as you know, I've sailed to the Ultimate Islands, and only out East did I find the same prodigal symphony of smells.

"In Penang, for example. Pepper!" (And now the whole face was alight with the relish of remembrance.) "Yes, pepper. All the magic of the Ultimate Isles in the pepper of the London Docks. And the fun of it is that out in Penang the smell of pepper called up visions of my magical London warehouses and young Harry mooning through them.

"In my youth I was always peeping through the gateway of the world, and seeing the ships, tall ships some of them then with a cloud of canvas, go fading away.

"But I was growing up, and I was in a ferment. So were all the fellows I knew. We couldn't be content to dream. There were tragic, dreadful things in

the East End streets and the brave, shabby houses I canvassed. We were desperately in earnest, we young fellows. There's that to be said for us. I don't want to talk about the Social Problem, which means . . . oh, never mind. But it filled me with a smouldering anger."

He bit hard into the stem of his pipe, then took my arm, and led me to the window, saying: "Come along, Willie, let's have a look at the view!"

We were in the Savage Club, and through the big windows we saw the joyous riot of green that rushes down from the Terrace to the Embankment.

"Not bad, that prospect," said Tomlinson. "And to think that the barbarians want to pull down Adelphi Terrace! Funny, isn't it?"

"That's what they call progress. Yes, progress! This precious mechanical civilisation of ours is so efficient that it can keep running only by destroying, one after the other, the only things worth preserving."

He turned to me, looking as savage as ever I've seen him.

"There's a beautiful old church in a country town that I know, with a one-way street on either side of it. No danger at all! For the cars *have* to slow up. All the same the blighters on the council want to heave the church down. And one of the Labour men is the worst of the lot of them.

"Do you know what he said, Willie?" (His face puckered into deep ridges out of which the eyes burnt like a coal.) "He said: 'I'd like to drive a tank clean over it.'"

H.M. stopped to fill his pipe, and his hands shook.

"Willie," he went on, "it's not long since I *saw* a tank driving over things!"

I think that for Tomlinson the Tank is the symbol of what's wrong with the world. A soulless machine driving over things, over all that is decent and comely, over all sane and simple human relationships,

over men, women, and little children. And, driving it is a man, or a committee, with a lust for power. Well, if it's a committee the tank may topple over, and then blow up. "Power," says Tomlinson, "brutal and conscienceless. Power, the last and meanest of the tyrannies."

Tomlinson saw the tanks in action when he was a War Correspondent. He didn't write the silly tosh that some of them did. And he doesn't talk the foul rot about our soldiers that some ex-Jingos do now.

"No," he says. "The soldiers weren't the wild men they've been painted. You know what I mean. They had no time for it; and they were too tired. And afraid—yes, to their bones. But brave to their hearts' core."

Tomlinson had a friend who was a captain in the Australian Army. While they were in the Somme offensive Harry got his friend to take him up the line. When the major in charge of the sector saw Tomlinson, he said: "Hullo, what the hell are you doing here? You'd better get out."

"But he let me stay for a while," says Harry with a twinkling smile. "Heavy stuff was falling all round us, though just where we were it was quiet. But a counter-attack was expected. At any moment. And the major held my eyes."

"His face was the colour of stone, and all pinched and wrinkled like the face of a very old man. He was shaking, every inch of him."

"Now when I get the wind up I have the trick of filling and lighting my pipe to see if my hand's steady. I did that now—I had the wind up all right—and mechanically the major tried to imitate me. But his hand shook too much. All his men were watching."

"So what does my pal but get on the firestep and survey the landscape. Then he hopped over, and stood upright. Well, I just had to follow him. We walked some way towards the German lines."

"Then, very deliberately, he unslung his glasses, and turned them on a village bang in front of us. 'I wonder if Jerry's in there,' he said. 'Shall we go and see?'

"I allowed a decent interval to elapse, and then said that when he'd had enough I should rather like to go back. So he turned, walked leisurely towards our trench, and stood aside for me to go first.

"I knew why he'd done it; but nothing was said. Of course in the push the major was as cool as a cucumber."

"That incident," says Harry, "was typical. And the ordinary Tommies were continually doing the most heroic things without thought of heroism and glory, but just because it seemed the only thing to do.

"And the screaming horror of it is that all that quenchless valour was buried in stinking mud and blood because the modern world—and Germany was the worst at the moment, I won't say by how much—is obsessed with the lust for machinery and money and, as the aim and end of machinery and money—POWER."

Tomlinson had been some years on the Street before the public discovered he was one of our finest writers and could make magic on Thames-side. I think his paper misused him, sent him to flower-shows and foundation-stones, broke the butterfly on the social whirl.

I used to meet him in the Quarter. He'd stop and say: "Well, Willie, have you been writing any poems lately?" And I might be able to tell him that I'd just published a tiny book of poems."

"Well, Willie," he'd say, with that exquisite smile of his, "if we can leave just that much behind us," and hold up a finger and thumb with half an inch of space between. Then, with a friendly nod, he'd pass on, the sentence unfinished.

Afterwards he became assistant editor of the

*Nation*, where letters were valued. And now he is statistically as well as in fact a literary man.

When I meet Harry, I try to see him as he was when I was a boy, and I wonder if he has changed at all. Well, yes, the lines of the face have strengthened, so that now it looks like the carved face of an idol, with jewels for eyes. He is a little deaf, too, perhaps from shell-fire. His experiences have left their mark then, but that's all. Harry is more of a boy than when I first knew him, for now we are of an age. Perhaps the glum has become the stern, but serenity is there as ever, the gentleness, the humour. He had experienced the worst of it long before the fight in France. And the worst was this :

Our Mutual Improvement Society was an Offshoot of the chapel; but it took on a life of its own. That was the time when Harry and the rest of them were in a ferment. I caught a touch of the fever, though I was yet a boy.

Now the book of the moment was "If Christ Came to Chicago" by W. T. Stead. And it was announced that a paper would be read to the M.I.S. on "If Christ Came to the East End."

The pastor got to hear of it—and the deacons—and imagined, quite wrongly, that religion was being attacked. So that night they came down in force, and the pastor took the chair.

Halfway through the reading, the pastor got up and said : "We have had enough of this blasphemy." And proceeded to scourge his young men.

"I don't blame them," says Harry the gentle. "They had their holy of holies, and they thought we were out to destroy it. But the effect on us young fellows was ghastly. Here were we trying to bring Christ into everyday life, and the leaders of our religious community treated us like criminals."

Yes, it was ghastly. The pastor was eloquent, and the scourge flayed.

It came to a climax—the last ruthless stroke. And

Harry Tomlinson got up, white in the face, with his little world in ruins about him.

He said : " Well, if that's your Christianity, I've done with it."

A tragic moment, eh?

Did the parson rush down the room and plead with Harry? No! He sat mum. And one of the deacons snarled : " Oh, Mr. Tomlinson, we've known that for a long time."

Harry made no reply. He just walked out, stern, yes stern and hopeless, and white as a sheet. And the rest followed him.

" Mind you," says Harry, " My excommunicators were all good men. But I have the idea that if they had listened to us young fellows—I mean taking the scene as typical—1914 might never have happened."

But I can't see how he makes that out.

## XIII

### LILIAN BAYLIS

MISS BAYLIS once said to a friend of mine: "Come to me in your joys, my dear, and come to me in your sorrows, but not in between whiles. I've no time for chit-chat." And there's the woman.

A woman who has devoted her life to one high aim, who thinks and dreams and above all works to that purpose every hour, every minute of the day; who uses, and uses up, her almost boundless energy every round of the clock. And yet has always leisure to share the joys and sorrows of her friends, and help the unfortunate with her consolation, her counsel, her service, her purse.

She is the sort of woman who achieves the impossible. And she has achieved it. Since 1914 she has kept a large theatre in London open and frequented, with Shakespeare and opera as the attractions.

She has made the Old Vic. as well-known as the National Gallery, and far more popular. She has created a unique band of players and a unique audience—an audience more intelligent and lively than any other.

While the trustees of the fund for a National Theatre have been deliberating about a site, she has established the National Theatre. She runs it. And, though she has had splendid help—almost the help she deserves—it is yet true to say that she did and does all this. In fact, Lilian Baylis is the Old Vic.

It was not until 1914 that I heard of her, though she had been manager of the theatre since the death of her aunt, Miss Emma Cons, in 1898. And I did not go

down to the Old Vic. until I had done my comic turn in khaki, and was back in Fleet Street in the autumn of 1915.

Then the miracle had already happened. I saw a fine company led by Sybil Thorndike—Miss Baylis, by the bye, cannot abide the notion of *stars*. I saw a tradition and a workshop already created. I saw an audience, eating sandwiches, and appreciating every nice shade of meaning, tragic or comic, in “Hamlet,” “Lear,” “Henry IV,” and “The Dream.”

I think that the audience struck me more than anything else. It was thrilled by the poetry or the drama, and convulsed by the low comedy at first intention—as a West End audience has more recently been thrilled by an Edgar Wallace crook-play, or convulsed by the humours of Ralph Lynn and the antics of Leslie Henson. For them Shakespeare was not a museum-exhibit, or a plaque in the Pantheon. He was our ever-living poet, and his plays had just been made. Hearty laughter, a hushed silence, and tears.

At first I was inclined to credit the miracle to Ben Greet, who produced the plays. But I and all England soon realised that there was a terrific momentum and a dominating personality in the place, which Ben Greet, fine producer though he is, did not account for. So England began to talk of Lilian.

Well, of course, she came on the stage on great nights after the fall of the curtain, and spoke to the audience like a loving and managing mother to her brood. We critics were out of it. We were allowed to look on; but the other people were at home.

You must remember that this was accomplished in the years of war, when, as I still think, life was better worth living and losing than ever before or since, but when there were Alps in the way of the production of anything but soldiers and arms. Moreover, the night-streets were pitchy, the road home was a trap; and any moment bugles might sound the *Take Cover*, and send the town scurrying.

The tale has often been told, but must needs be told here, of how, while they were playing "King John," a raid began. And, just as Russell Thorndike was saying :

" Some airy devil hovers in the sky,  
And drops down mischief,"

Jerry dropped a bomb on Waterloo Station, a hundred yards away. The noise was terrific, but the play went on. Lilian Baylis doesn't let little things like that interfere with her, though she has the tenderest heart in the world. There were humours, too, during the War, at The Vic. Once in the "Merchant of Venice," when Shylock demanded his pound of flesh, a voice from the gallery cried : " Make him show his meat card ! "

Of course she was doing national service. I need not labour that. She kept the flag flying as truly as any soldier at the front, or sister in a casualty station. And she was both soldier and sister, for she entertained thousands of refugees, wounded men, and Tommies on leave.

Did she feel the strain? She did not show it. You could always find her—by appointment—in her little office at The Vic., drinking tea, with her little dog tuff-tuffing round her, and prepared (Miss Baylis was; the dear dog was beyond argument) to discuss the affairs of the Old Vic. as a question of housekeeping and national emergency.

A homely yet dominant figure with alert yet abstracted glance. A comfortable restful presence yet a potential avalanche. She took everything for granted, and it was granted; she knew what she wanted, and it was done. You knew, as you watched her, and listened to her casual, confidential talk, that she wanted only one thing—the success of the Old Vic., and that she wanted it badly. You knew that as long as Lilian Baylis lived the Old Vic. would not fail.

Then I went down to The Vic. as Press agent. The

personnel of the players had changed again and again since those first days; actors and actresses had left the school to lead West End companies. There had been new producers: Robert Atkins had come and gone, and now it was Andrew Leigh.

It was a great season. For Edith Evans was there, as she put it—the modest star!—“to learn how to play Shakespeare”; and Bai Holoway, Shakespearean to his naughty bones, was her compère. The more knowledgeable critics said they were making theatrical history down at The Vic. And indeed each first-night was memorable. Bai was almost always fine, especially in a part that showed a nerve of twisted humour; and Edith’s acting often caught me at the heart with a shock of sudden ecstasy.

And the fun, the frolic of it all! Those rehearsals that were mad romps and yet so business-like—Bai making faces and cutting capers, until the voice of Lilian was heard from the stalls, saying: “Andrew, don’t you think . . . ?” Which brought a sheepish grin to Bai’s face and a return to the person of the drama.

Or I would wander behind stage, and find John Garside designing costumes, or Charles Marford painting on a league-long canvas with brushes of comet’s hair, until they were called to rehearse. For, bless you, they were of the company, and fine actors both. And the stage-manager acted, and the assistant-stage-manager. Nobody had time to idle down at The Vic.

Even Bob the stage-doorkeeper came on as the Clown in the Harlequinade played by the stage-hands at the Children’s Christmas tea-party: poor children of the neighbourhood packing the whole huge floor of the house, with Lilian shepherding them (and us who served and waited) like a tremendous fairy-godmother.

The climax came when Andrew produced his Christmas Revue, Edith frisked and curveted, Bai did George Graves, and the rest of the company went mad. That’s the right sort of Shakespearean company.

Lilian did not frolic—you did not expect frolic from a British Institution. That is, she kept her homely dignity. But she was the queen of all the revels; and I am sure that she frolicked inside.

Surprising it was how she would reveal from time to time her carefully hidden vein of humour! When, at a later date, the Duchess of York came down to unveil the plaque to Emma Cons, they played "The Merchant of Venice," and Lilian donned her academic robes. During an interval Miss Baylis met me in a passage and told me: "Her Royal Highness said: 'Miss Baylis, you look more like Portia than the actress on the stage.' And I said to her: 'Well, Your Royal Highness, I haven't got the breeks on.'"

The boosting of *stars*, as I have said, annoyed her—the company was the thing—and so did any interference by a living author (when we deserted the classics) with the work of the producer.

Once we had an undoubted star, for that production only; and at the photo-call I, as in duty bound, was taking a number of pictures of the play with the star in them. Came the voice of Lilian from the stalls: "I think we've had enough of . . . Let's have some of the others!" And a little later on the same occasion: "We might as well have a picture of the author; we've heard a good deal of him (or her) at rehearsal."

No fear or favour with Lilian. To king, councillor, or commoner she speaks her mind.

There was an occasion when scions of royalty asked for a box. Lilian was sorry, but all the boxes were full. The Governors' Box, it was suggested. No, the Governors were using it. Any other time she'd be honoured.

That was a great night when Madame Berens, the grand-daughter of Tom Robertson, came from Paris to play in "Caste." The French Ambassador was there, and he came on the stage for the reception after the show. Players of two generations to meet him—all the heirs, executors, and assigns of Tom Robertson. Lilian introduced them to His Excellency as—

Roberston relics, and passed on. Andrew and the rest of her company were her chief concern. She swept by me in full flight, asked: "Have you got anything to eat?" saw that I had my mouth full, said: "I see you're eating," and vanished in the throng.

I had always wondered why Lilian did not get a licence for the house—it would have been a simple affair. Many members of the audience, including the jollier critics, went out to neighbouring hostelries at the intervals. And so the house lost revenue. But: "No," Lilian used to say, "I promised my aunt that drink should never be sold at the Old Vic., and it never shall be, revenue or no revenue."

She mentioned incidentally, and without regret—almost with satisfaction—that she had given up a career to help Miss Cons at the Old Vic. Got a pound a week for it, and lived with her aunt, whereas she had been earning £50 a month in South Africa from concerts and teaching.

For Miss Baylis is a fine musician, and was once an infant prodigy. She was taught the violin by the famous Carrodus—J. Toplady of that Ilk—and she might have been a great violinist. But the family concert-party—parents, brother and little Lilian—went to the Colonies.

Lilian had a pretty soprano voice, and sang to the guitar or the banjo. Out in Jo'burg she moved the rough miners to tears with "Home Sweet Home." And those who know Miss Baylis can well believe it. For within the prim corsage of that tremendous lady beats the tenderest heart alive. I always address her as Miss Baylis—I should just think so. But I always think of her as Lilian.

She began organising as a very young woman in Jo'burg. Almost all she has done since was in embryo there. "Yes," she said, "I was busy. I had a small ladies' orchestra, composed of the wives of the local magnates—(Solly Joel's first wife was a member)—a ladies'-and-children's orchestra and a banjo team of

young bank-officials; I taught music, and more surprising, I taught dancing." If she'd stopped long enough in Jo'burg, she'd have given them a national theatre.

Among her dancing pupils were the children of eight of the men who were sentenced to death for their share in the Jameson Raid. The Raid happened just then, and so she met Mark Twain, who was held up by it in Jo'burg. "He came to my dancing-class," she said, "and insisted that he should join the lancers. But" (very grimly) "I didn't let him." Poor Mark Twain! I have no doubt that his intentions were perfectly honourable.

Then her health broke down, and she was ordered away for the sea-voyage home and a good long rest when she got there. "I had the sea-voyage," says Miss Baylis, "but so far on my earthly pilgrimage I have never had a good long rest."

Of course not! She'd hate it. But what happened then was that Lilian found her aunt ill and the Old Vic. needing her. And there she was. And there she is. For her lifetime.

Sadlers Wells has happened along as an extra, and with more kicks, I fear, than ha'pence. But the Old Vic. is her home.

The Old Vic. won her the C.H. "I'm glad it wasn't the Dame," said Lilian. "I should hate to be a Dame. But I'm very proud and grateful for this. I've looked through the list of Companions, and they are really distinguished people." But, in fact, Miss Lilian Baylis is the most distinguished of them all.

She has done much for Shakespeare—more than he has done for her. For in the lean times it was opera saw her through. "There was always that," says Lilian. "When we were hard put to it, we could always shove on the dear old 'Girl.'" "The Bohemian Girl"! That fount of melody.

And the way Lilian puts it gives me an apt name for her. In spite of her stubborn autocracy, which her devoted henchmen and henchwomen writhe under and

rejoice in, she is for all of us The Dear Old Girl. And, mark you, I use the adjective *old* as a term of affection, for Lilian is the youngest of the lot of us, and long after you and I are under the daisies, my fine buck, Lilian will be thanking all friends present on the first-nights of Old Vic. seasons for the wonderful reception of the play.

Yes, there we'll take leave of her. The players have passed singly before the curtain with a salvo for each of them, and now it is Lilian. As the curtain rises to disclose her with her chicks all grouped behind, a mine bursts, and the applause rushes to the roof, with the drum-fire echoing after.

She steps forward, quite unperturbed, and stands twisting her body slightly on one leg, with her face cocked sideways, and her eyes, masked by her spectacles, turned up to the top tier.

“They've been wonderful,” she says. “But they always are. She feels sure that they will support her loyally throughout the coming season, which will be a trying one for the company and her. They are making some experiments. (And then she names the experiments.) There are some new faces in the cast. But most of the old favourites are still with us. (Applause.) And she is glad to see some of the old favourites in the house. (Tremendous applause.) Sybil Thorndike (delirium), Ernest Milton (delirium). *Et hoc genus homines.* And copies of the *Old Vic. Magazine* may be had from the attendants.”

Good old Lilian! Dear old girl! I from under the daisies, or as an aerial visitant—though not, I trust, as an airy devil dropping down mischief—shall tune my ear to catch that grumble of yours which hides such limitless pride and joy.

And so much humility, withal!

She is convinced that she owes nothing to herself, and all to prayer. For this formidable woman, this leader of forlorn hopes, this business organiser, has a white soul, and is very near to God.

McNEIL OF THE *MAURETANIA*

“ WOULD you like to have a chin-wag with McNeil of the *Mauretania*? ” asked Redwood, the Cunard publicity hound over the phone. “ There’ll be lunch on the *Ascania*, and a modicum of booze. Jack Edge of the *Trans-Atlantic Mail* is coming down.” I said: “ Rather! ” For everybody knew that Jack Edge was a good companion, and that Captain S. G. S. McNeil was the greatest thing afloat.

Jack Edge wasn’t with us on the train—first-class, and all according. He’d gone down the night before, Redwood said, to save the trouble of getting up early.

When we reached Southampton, Redwood took me down to the Docks. And there were the giants towering heavens-high above the quays, the *Ascania* with the Blue Peter already at the peak, the *Mauretania* still loading. It was the *Mauretania* that took my fancy—the clean strong lines of her. But we were soon on board, and Redwood showed me round while we waited the king’s pleasure.

She was tremendous. Far more than a hotel, more than a palace, more than a castle. And she was always a ship. But a ship that you felt in your bones could never be at the mercy of the elements. . . . And then I said to myself with sudden shocked surprise: “ By Jove, Leviathans like this have gone down! ” I saw those steadfast walls torn agape and ocean rushing in. . . . But when I met McNeil I had no doubts about the *Mauretania*.

There at the open door of his outer room, and filling the doorway, was the King of the Castle.

A big solid yet jovial face, steady measuring yet mischievous eyes, a mouth like the day of Judgment. I got the queer impression that the ruddy cheeks had once had a deeper tan, and that the wrinkles at the corners of the eyes had been half smoothed away.

The spick-and-span uniform was worn sacramentally, the gold-braided cap, low down over the eyes, was a crown. McNeil was every inch a captain, and every inch a man.

He bustled us in with regal good-humour; Redwood introduced me, and vanished. McNeil with his cap on the table, swivelled his chair round, so that he faced me, and waited like a friendly dog eager for a game.

Every now and then somebody knocked, an anxious face looked in, an annoyed but deferential voice said: "I'll come again."

"Well," said the Captain, "it's fun looking back. And it's a long way to look. I was a brisk boy. Always up to tricks. Always making things. I made bridges—cantilevers. And I used to get on top of them, too, just to show the other boys they were solid." (He laughed.) "It's a wonder I didn't break my fool neck."

W.R.T. "So you might have been a bridge-builder."

He looked at me as if he didn't quite understand what I meant. And then I remembered that all seamen are fatalists. He went on: "No; I don't think so. But . . ."

He bent forward, his big hands on his big knees, and an angry light in his eyes.

" . . . The mush that boys read nowadays! Nothing like the books I used to read."

W.R.T. "I used to read Cooper, Ballantyne, Marryat, Kingston . . ."

THE CAPTAIN (*quickly*). "And Mayne Reid."

W.R.T. "That gave you the spur to adventure."

THE CAPTAIN (*doggedly*). "I wanted to be a naturalist. You remember 'Nat the Naturalist'?" (I nodded. He nodded and grinned.) "I thought that would take me into wild places. And then . . ."

(He sat pondering over the inscrutable ways of Destiny.)

" . . . You see my father died when I was a little boy. And at the age of twelve I up and told my mother that I wasn't going to school any more. I was going to sea. Bit of a facer!"

"But I had two sailor-brothers, one of them about ten years older than me. And I thought he looked fine in his uniform. So I told him the tale. He agreed, and took me to see a skipper.

"The skipper said: 'Well young fellow-me-lad, you look as if you could get through a barrel of beef.' Which wasn't true. I was a thin lad. Anyhow I was apprenticed, and went to sea."

W.R.T. "With your brother?"

THE CAPTAIN. "No! That would have been bad for me."

W.R.T. "A pretty rough time you had."

THE CAPTAIN. "Yes." (The faraway look I had missed came into his eyes.) "A pretty rough time. No pay. Hard treatment. And the food! . . . They told your friends that you would have the same food as the captain. But you didn't. No. . . . You didn't."

W.R.T. "Did you ever regret that you weren't a naturalist?"

THE CAPTAIN (*simply*). "No. Never. I had chosen the sea. It seemed the natural life. It *is* the natural life."

"And with a skipper who looked after his

apprentices you learnt your profession. I had a good skipper. When I wasn't splicing a rope I was learning to furl a sail."

W.R.T. "Navigation?"

THE CAPTAIN. "You were always at that. By the time I'd been two years at sea I could've got my extra-master's certificate. So far as navigation went."

W.R.T. "Look-out?"

THE CAPTAIN. "Contrary to Board of Trade Regulations. Not being an A.B. Unless the crew were down with fever. That happened. The old man, one A.B., and me on deck, and the rest of the ship's company in their bunks shivering."

W.R.T. "The men were rough customers?"

THE CAPTAIN. "Rough?" (*He laughed.*) "Yes, I should say they were rough. But being among them was a liberal education. Men from almost every profession they were. Farmers, army-officers—there was a lieutenant-colonel—lawyers, doctors, parsons. Men who'd left the gold-diggings with hundreds of pounds in their pockets—I knew one old Forty-Niner (the great California gold-rush). They'd come down through drink. And worse. Yes, they were bad men, most of them, some of them. But" (he lifted his head as if he were giving the salute) "they were all seamen."

Here a short sturdy man, bright and brisk—the local manager for the Line—who had hustled in during this exordium, and sat tentatively on the sofa, seized the Captain by the arm, and led him into the sleeping-cabin, talking as they went. The next minute he hustled off, and the Captain returned to me, "unhurried, swift, and sure."

THE CAPTAIN (*sitting down, and fingering his cap*). “I can’t understand even a farmer taking to the sea. But a lawyer!”

W.R.T. “Were the men good to you?”

THE CAPTAIN. “They were. Rough—but decent. They taught me a lot. But they taught me no evil. I remember . . .”

(He thumped his fist on his knee.)

“ . . . The crew had gone ashore in a foreign port. Twenty-four hours’ leave and a months’ pay. You can guess. And three young chaps considerably older than myself—seventeen to twenty-three—had wandered with me into a certain street. I was lagging behind, when one of the toughest of the tough loomed up from somewhere, and said: ‘Get back to your ship, you b— young fool, or I’ll knock your b— head off.’

“I understood. And I went. I had always been up to my tricks. But I had no vice in me. I never brought sorrow to my mother’s heart.”

W.R.T. “When did you become a skipper?”

THE CAPTAIN. “When I was twenty-three.”

W.R.T. “That’s remarkable.”

THE CAPTAIN. “Not in our family. My eldest brother was skipper at twenty-one and a half. My ship was the *Liverpool*. The *Liverpool*! A beauty!”

(He seemed to see as in a vision his first alongside his latest command. Did he love Leviathan better than his proud cockleshell?)

W.R.T. “When did you turn to steam?”

THE CAPTAIN. “Very soon after. I hated steam. I hate it still.”

W.R.T. “Then why? . . .”

THE CAPTAIN (*with a good-humoured grin*). “The petticoats. When you get entangled with a

girl, and mean to marry her, two-year voyages don't seem fair."

W.R.T. "Shipping has gone a long way since then."

THE CAPTAIN (*with a roar*). "It goes faster. But look at your seamen! To get the feel of the sea and a sense of the weather you must serve under sail.

"When the sea rises up to the sky" (he said solemnly) "and the sky comes down to the sea, and the ship looks like a bit of matchwood in the waters."

There was a pause. Then the look of abstraction passed, and he went on vehemently: "Every Continental sea-power trains its men under sail. Why don't we? Why don't we? It's suicidal not to. It's a crime."

Here a clerk entered with a sheaf of papers to be signed. The Captain took them, and read from the topmost:

"Do you know the deviation of the compass?" Yes" (looking up at the clerk). "But can you apply it? Well, when you've got the gyroscopic compass you won't be able to."

He turned to me, as the clerk took the papers away, and said cryptically: "Scotch navigation! Brute force and stupidity!"

W.R.T. "Has the Wireless taken away the sense of isolation?"

THE CAPTAIN (*obstinately*). "Not a bit of it! Shipwrecks don't happen in calm weather. And in a tempest your Wireless is useless. Except as a comfort to nervous passengers. Of course it can tell you what's won the Derby."

W.R.T. "Do seamen still feel that the ship is a living thing?"

THE CAPTAIN. "Most officers do. And some en-

gineers. And by the Lord Harry, the *Mauretania* is a ship! A real ship, sir! Somebody said to me once: 'The *Europa* and the *Bremen* are splendid ships.' I said: 'Not ships, my man. Tanks!' But look at the *Mauretania*! Look at the lines of her! A racehorse at the start. When we were in Liverpool once I heard a Lancashire man say to his girl: 'Eh, lass, but she's a lovely thing.' And he was right."

W.R.T. "You took her along faster than ever before?"

THE CAPTAIN (*with a proud lift of his head*). "Yes, with the changes we made in her down below, we took her up from twenty-six knots to twenty-seven and a half. She was an old ship, sir, she'd come of age. But, take the bilge-keels off her, and she'll beat the *Bremen* yet."

So I left him, joyous, triumphant, the master of his ship.

And the next time I saw him they had robbed him of his darling.

It was deep in the New Forest, in the sunny garden of a fine old house where he had found his anchorage. Out of sight and out of the smell of the sea. Yet the big red-faced man on the garden-swing seemed just come ashore, and I knew that he was always tooling down to Southampton to have a squint at the shipping. In mufti of course—uncrowned; but still in every inch of him Captain McNeil. Ay, McNeil of the *Mauretania*!

Somehow he seemed younger—he was care-free. And as the big man jumped up and strode towards me, I marvelled at the folly of those who had judged

this buoyant fellow no longer fit to command. To command a ship? To command a continent!—provided it was seaworthy and obeyed the hel-um.

He was jollier, less reserved than he had been on board. He was taking a holiday. Yet though he seemed so care-free—no floating world now to dry-nurse through the seas—it was very soon plain to me that the sword had cut deep.

“ Too old at sixty! Look at me! ” Well, he laughed at that. And he told me how he was going to start a great campaign and in between whiles write books.

He has written one book already: “ In Great Waters ”—the story of his fine career. Which is why I shall not tell you all the tales he told me in the New Forest garden—for example how during the War he steered the *Reindeer* backwards into Mudros Harbour with his forward bulkhead smashed to smithereens and his decks packed with troops.

And he has started his campaign. He is going to convince the powers-that-be-and-don’t-do that unless we insist on sea-training under sail, as a sea-power we are done for. He’ll do it. He has the conviction of a prophet, the knowledge of sea-encyclopaedia, and the vitality of—well, there’s nothing so vital as Captain S. G. S. McNeil.

## XV

### THE AGA KHAN

THIS is no more than an impression. The Aga Khan—Aga Sultan Sir Mahomed Shah—is infinitely approachable, but quite undecipherable. He seems to exhibit the whole of his jolly personality to each chance customer. But I am conscious that this is all merrymaking in the courtyard. There is doorway beyond doorway, veil behind veil. Behind the last veil the Aga Khan dwells secluded.

If you have seen him on the racecourse, absorbed by delighted excitement, or leading in his winner, bare-headed, and the face one broad jolly smile, and if that is all you know about him, you know nothing. Yet to most English people the Aga Khan is just a jolly sportsman, and as straight as they make them.

Perhaps they have heard that he is the head of one of the two great Mohammedan sects—the Ismaili Muslims. But that conveys little to them. They may even have heard the rumour that his followers regard him, not only as infallible, like His Holiness the Pope, but impeccable—sinless. But when they see the jolly sportsman, in the flesh or in the newspapers, it is clear to them that he must regard all that as a good joke. And they are wrong, utterly wrong.

His Highness is a person of world-importance. By crooking his little finger he could plunge half the world in war, but he has devoted his life to the cause of peace.

I was aware of the enigma before I met him. Yet when I did meet him my surprise was complete.

It was at the Ritz Hotel in Paris. When I was sum-

moned to his presence, I found him in possession of the place—not in a casual hotel, but as it were in his home, his palace. And all the other visitors were his honoured guests.

Yet the royal state was implicit in the atmosphere, not at all explicit in the happy man bubbling with life and high-spirits who moved swiftly to meet me and took my hand in his soft strong palm.

A large man, though not tall. Legs in white flannel. A big eager face. An air of supreme contentment.

No doubt a kingly man. Happy to talk on equal terms with any of his subjects. But with his authority unassailable.

Yet this king with a hundred million life-and-death-devoted subjects has no kingdom, his address is Aga House, Bombay, and his palace is a Ritz Hotel.

Not knowing my man, I tried to get him to talk about racing. Yes, he acknowledged that racing meant a good deal to him. But then racing had always been a part of his natural life. “I was always among horses. I loved them. I rode a pony when I was two. Probably” (he laughed, and showed all his strong white teeth, that looked dazzling in that somewhat dusky face), “probably I rode a wooden horse in the nursery.

“My father raced, and my grandfather. All my ancestors, Arabic and Persian, were horsemen. Far back in Time. Always horsemen. To speed on horseback over great plains has always been as natural to men of my race as it is natural for men of your race to speed in ships upon the sea.

“Yes, racing is a great game. Perhaps more than a game, when you remember what the horse has meant to man.”

W.R.T. “So you love the horse more than the game.”  
THE AGA KHAN. “Oh, I like games immensely.” (I  
felt that still he was fencing.) “They are a

fine recreation for the mind, and they give you control of your body.”

W.R.T. “But there are other things more important.”

He looked at me with a solemn twinkle. “Yes, there are other things more important. For example: health. The fun you get from games is part of life; but they are important because they keep you healthy.

“Health is tremendously important. I know, for I have been unhealthy. The red-letter-day of change came twenty years ago when it happened that I sat next at table to Lady Oxford—Mrs. Asquith, as she was then.

“It must always matter to a man that he sits next to that admirably witty lady. But this time she gave me health as well as entertainment. She told me of a medicine. And that medicine probably saved me from becoming a hopeless neurasthenic.”

I felt that still he was keeping me at bay. So I tried a new line. I alluded to the inestimable services he had rendered the Allies by preventing the enlistment of the whole Mohammedan world on the side of Germany.

He gave a short quick nod. “Yes,” he said, “I was able to do something.”

W.R.T. “Some people have wondered how it was possible, with Turkey against us, for you to be on the side of the Allies.”

(He considered me gravely).

“I was able to be because I belong to two worlds. There is my Persian and Arabic descent. There is my descent from the Prophet.”

W.R.T. “That must have mattered supremely.”

THE AGA KHAN. “Supremely.”

(He looked down for a moment, very much aloof, very stern. Then he turned his fierce gay eyes on me, and spoke again with animation.)

“But I was born in India. And I regard myself as a member of that community. India and her welfare are very dear to me. Very dear. The problem of her destiny occupies my mind to-day.

“But for many years now I have been a citizen of the world, above all of Europe. And so when the War came I was able to understand a great deal, and to do—a little.

“And let me say here how much I owe to my sound knowledge of the language of this Continent. It is not merely a new speech is given you. No, you are made free of a new culture, a new world. That is an opportunity—to have your own race, and be proud of it, your own country, and love it—and then to have all those other countries! To be able to live the life of many nations, not as an outsider, but as one of themselves!”

(Yes, I thought to myself. That's what makes you the enigma. You slip on a culture, a special milieu like a garment. You are one of ourselves. When you talked to that waiter you were a typical Frenchman, on our racecourses you are a typical English racing-man. And all the while you are something quite different. What is it?)

THE AGA KHAN. “You will understand, then, how dreadful to me was the outbreak of war. Cataclysmic! You see, I had been convinced that such a war was impossible. I had said so.” (He made a hopeless gesture with his hands.) “And then the whole world went to pieces. *My* world went to pieces.

“I had believed in the hereditary principle.” (He sat upright in his chair, with his hands on the arms, and his face was that of a hanging judge.) “But now I was forced to say that if the ruling classes could

bring us to this, they were no longer fit to rule."

W.R.T. "Do you think that England could have avoided the War?"

THE AGA KHAN. "No, I don't say that she could. No! The Germans were not evil men. But they were—impossible. They had their obsession. Which was symbolised by . . ."

W.R.T. "The goosestep?"

THE AGA KHAN. "Precisely! The goosestep! They were impossible. But . . . Anyhow, I concluded that hereditary rule, class rule was discredited."

W.R.T. "That was a momentous conclusion to have forced upon you."

THE AGA KHAN. "For me?—cataclysmic. It changed my whole scheme of things, my whole plan."

W.R.T. "Does your conclusion apply to the native princes of India?"

THE AGA KHAN. "They are on their trial. They must prove themselves—now.

"I think of nothing nowadays except to avoid the renewed catastrophe of war. I was once a devoted student of English literature. Shakespeare, of course. But before the War I read many novels. After re-reading them, I found that none of them—Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot—was so much to my mind as three of the moderns: first of all Conrad, then Wells (I love all of Wells) and then Arnold Bennett.

"But that is past. Since the War I have read nothing but books about it. I have read everything—on the causes of it, the course of it, and the lamentable things that happened after it, beginning with the most lamentable thing of all: the Treaty of Versailles.

"I think that next to the War itself, the

treaty was the most shocking thing that has happened to the world in modern times. The opportunities that were missed! The old animosities that were maintained, the new ones that were aroused!

“Yes, if the War discredited the ruling classes, what shall be said of the peace?

“And now I use my opportunities of mixing with people of influence—and I do mix with them—to tell them that another war like the last would finish us, would abolish civilisation and plunge us into barbaric chaos. That is a fact. Beyond argument. And yet it is a fact beyond argument that the world is drifting steadily towards that war.”

For a moment, as he rose with me, and repeated his resolve to spare no effort in his campaign of warning, I thought I caught a glimpse of the real Aga Khan, but the next moment he was an affable man-of-the-world. The next he had turned to a hotel-attendant, and had forgotten me.

My other interviews with the Aga Khan were in London. And there, though once it was in the Derby week, I caught only one stray hint of the racing man.

Once we talked of happiness. And he said, with conviction, that the first essential condition was to be at one with Him whom he called Allah, and I called God. Then there was nature—incomparable dawns and sunsets, a night of stars, craggy hills and soft valleys, great open spaces with the wind on them, the beauty and scent of flowers.

As a secondary thing there was great art and great literature, that showed you the glory of the world, and offered homage for it to God.

Then there was movement, the movement of the body. You got that in games—golf, tennis (he did not know cricket). But you got it at its finest on the

back of a horse. Yes, I felt that to this man a horse—but not a horse-race—was necessary to happiness.

I talked of a wife and children. Of course, he said. But happiness in wife and children was dependent on others. Yet he thought the man who deliberately renounced family life was a coward or a knave. He had no liking for the anchorite. To be a man you must accept responsibilities. Sorrow might come, but the man would be happy if he were at one with God.

The last time I saw him—and that was in Derby week—he sat tearing open envelopes, dictating letters of appointment to his secretary, and talking in between whiles of deep things.

And now I understood how complete is his acceptance of what he regards as the inevitable course of events. For example, he said : "Always desire that which happens! Do not seek to change the event to your desire!" And when I questioned that counsel, so repugnant to the Western mind, he told me, smiling, that if a wall fell and crushed his foot, he would say—and believe—"that is the best thing that could have happened to me." I felt inclined to ask him if he thought that the War was the best thing that could have happened to the world.

But the English secretary broke in. She said : "That's ridiculous." He smiled at her, and went on : "The son of a friend of mine was killed. And the father said : 'That is the best thing that could have happened to him.'"

The secretary snorted, and said : "Then he couldn't have loved his son." On the contrary, said the Aga Khan, he loved him dearly. He admitted that he himself had not reached that height; but he hoped to reach it.

At that moment he was rung up on the telephone, and he said to the caller : "Tell the Ranee that if she puts her money on Orwell she won't go far wrong."

## XVI

### CHALIAPINE

HAD he a Christian name? Probably. But for me he was Chaliapine. There could be no other of his name. He was a unique phenomenon. God spake, and there he was—singing.

I first heard and saw him from the gallery of Drury Lane. That was in 1913, when Beecham brought the Russians to London. I was a Wagnerian, but “Boris Godounov” taught me better. I thought I knew how an opera should be sung, and the Russians showed me how it should be acted.

This is background—atmosphere, an atmosphere of emotional excitement and exhilaration. In the foreground is this marvel.

Have there been greater singers? I don’t know. Have there been greater actors? Perhaps! But of a surety there has never been a fine singer who was so great an actor or a fine actor who has been so great a singer. And the true marvel of it was that in him the two arts were one.

Other operatic singers—even the best of them—sing and don’t act, or act and don’t sing, but speak. Here was an actor-singer whose every tone was both dramatically and musically true. Well, that was the case, to an extent, with all the Russians—I mean, that was the aim of all. But only in Chaliapine did it blossom into perfection.

Yes, perfection. The Russian impressed me as I have been impressed only by two other artists: Isadora Duncan and Marie Lloyd.

And, like them, he achieved his most tremendous

effects without apparent effort. Even his rage, that made the air around me high up in the gallery tremble, was well within his stride.

Moreover it was only by taking thought that you brought Chaliapine into it. Singer and actor, he disappeared completely in his part.

Finally, I thought it remarkable that, while Russian ballet was frankly conventional—artifice—in this Russian music-drama the convention could almost at once be taken for granted, and the splendid artifice looked like nature.

All these reflections came later. When I was face to face with Chaliapine—and him half a mile away below—his voice, his gestures, *his presence* possessed me.

Then came the War, and Chaliapine stayed in Russia. I should have to look it up to tell you what he did, so I shan't tell you. He stayed until 1921, and I have an idea that for a while he was producing opera for the Bolsheviks. How they came to lose him I don't know. Chaliapine does not discuss his country with foreigners.

But after that he came frequently to England, though always as a concert-singer. They did not send me tickets, and I could not afford them. I was not too sorry, for I felt I should have been disappointed. After all, he is a man-of-the-theatre. In dress-clothes on a concert-platform I feared that the giant would look silly.

At last he came back to us—at the Lyceum—in “Boris” and the rest; and I was there. I recaptured the old magic, though at times I thought that the great calm voice was a little tired. But after all he will be sixty next February.

Sixty! And the world outside Russia first heard of him in 1908. What had he been doing before then? I wanted to know. So I went to ask him.

Of course I had heard that he was once a workman; and there was a rumour that when English society

wanted to lionise him he would be missing—gone down to the East End, sometimes with his friend Gorky, to drink in little Russian cafés, and crack jokes with Russian workmen. I had heard too—Lady Diana Cooper had told me—that sometimes in a prim drawing-room he would romp like a boy.

That was all I knew of him when he entered the room where I awaited him at the Savoy.

He seemed older than his years, very old. But upright and alert, and as impressive as on the stage. And this time it was Chaliapine.

I don't know what he wore. But I had the queer fancy that a shadowy robe fell from his shoulders. Certainly the face had the gravity of a prophet and the repose of the recluse. But the eyes had the innocence of a child.

Now the eyes were fixed on me, keenly concentrated in challenge or agreement—the strong eyebrows low down over them. Now they were abstracted, limpid—and then the face was a mask. But always the eyes were innocent and young.

“How did it happen—that which has happened?” he said in a quiet old voice with a pleasantly foreign colour. He considered, the eyes abstracted, the face a mask, the spirit a long way off.

“The question,” and he searched my face as if for the answer, “is difficult. For Fate is a mystery. Why was it thus, and not otherwise? Who knows?”

He traced a pattern with his pale finger on the table. The finger stopped.

“But I can put my finger on three things which, more than others, have seemed to mould the child Fedor Ivanovitch into the man Chaliapine.”

Fedor Ivanovitch! It was like an incantation. At the utterance of those names which fame had obliterated, the grave prophet who is the other self of Boris and Ivan disappeared, and I was looking into the eyes of Fedor the son of Ivan, a Russian boy.

“I was a child of eight,” he said, “living with my

father and my mother. Poor folk. In the Tartar town of Kasan. Life was hard for us, yes, hard. And amusements were few. But at least there was the church. In the church there was colour, there was music. There was hope.

“ But I shall speak now only of the music.

“ I was astonished. . . . I don’t know when I began to be astonished, but very young. I was astonished that in the sacred choruses twenty people could sing together in different parts and yet make one song of it. That seemed a miracle. Well,” he said with emphasis, “ that remains a miracle.”

“ That out of two sounds,” I murmured, “ he can make, not a third sound, but a star.”

Fedor nodded agreement, and went on :

“ It was then I began to think of my own voice, and to try it. Artlessly of course. As a bird tries out its carol; yet I think with that blind purpose—which an artist must always have—already within me. If you like you may say that Fate’s finger first touched me then.

“ A little later my father and my mother moved to other rooms in another quarter of Kasan. As I have told you, they were very poor folk, and we lived in the cellar.

“ Away up above us lived the chorus-master of the church. And to him came the young choristers for their rehearsal. That to me was very wonderful. Imagine it! Sitting at the door of my dark cellar deep down I could hear them like angels singing.”

And the young eyes looked up as if still the old man heard them sing.

“ So, one day, the young boy Fedor went upstairs, and said to the master: ‘ Master, I too have a voice.’ Very gravely the master took his violin, and said: ‘ Then sing! ’

“ So I sang.

“ And he said: ‘ Yes, I will train you.’

“ That was how it was. So simple. When I went

back to my dark cellar in my heart there was music and colour and hope.

“ Thus it came about that my childish treble was heard in the church choir. That was a great day for me, that first one. . . .”

He looked at me, keenly observant, to see if I understood. I said, somewhat lamely: “ A great day! ”

“ Now I must tell you,” he said, “ that I knew nothing about the theatre. Punch and Judy shows I knew. But no more.

“ Then one day when we had sung a Mass, a bigger boy than I asked me if I would like to go to the theatre. I asked what I should see and what it would cost.

“ He said I should see ‘ Russian Marriage,’ and that the ticket cost fifteen kopeks—say sixpence. But I laughed and said I would be a fool to spend fifteen good kopeks to see a Russian marriage, which I had so often seen in church, and found not at all interesting.

“ But he said it would be different. And he would give to me the ticket, which he had, because he could not go. So, since the ticket cost me nothing, I went.

“ And then happened the second miracle.

“ There was the great well-lighted place full of happy people, there was the Court box, there were the uniforms—and then the curtain went up.

“ How could I tell you? . . . Never had I imagined such a world, a world so real yet so far off, where the people were all so prettily dressed, and spoke and moved so well, and the dancing and singing made one enchantment.

“ From that moment I thought of nothing but the theatre, and spent all of my few kopeks upon it. I did not think that I might ever be upon the stage; I was content with the delectable dream. Only, I wanted to be *in* the theatre—to sweep the floors, to help move the scenery, to do—anything. And at seventeen when my voice broke I had my wish.

“ I did all the *menial* jobs that I had thought of. In a Russian stage-workshop the apprentice did. And you know he learnt to act, to sing, to dance. Yes, he learnt his art. And art is not easy.

“ I did not fear the work, but I was not of the mind to settle down. The two first authors that I read were Mayne Reid and Fennimore Cooper, and they made me long for the vagabond life.

“ Well, it was possible in Russia then to be a happy vagabond. There were many—many. I joined a troupe of what you would call gipsies. Merry folk!

“ We wandered from town to town, from village to village with our cart, setting up a tent for a theatre, acting, singing, dancing.

“ No! ” (He raised his head, and looked thoughtfully into space.) “ I cannot call it a bad life. It was hard. Yes. But it was happy.

“ I wandered for years. It seemed a lifetime. All over Russia. And my years of wandering taught me so much. Taught me to know the real Russia, which those of the towns cannot understand.

“ It is a big place Russia—almost a world. And I wandered everywhere. The people I met and learnt to know were the poor. Ah, yes, and they are the people with eyes and hearts and imaginations. I tell you wealth blinds and cramps the soul. It is the poor, the poor everywhere, who see and understand.

“ That is really the end of it, you know. For when I went back to the theatre—I mean the house made with hands, for the real theatre I had never left—Chaliapine had been moulded. After that there is nothing to tell of but a steady moving up. And it is not interesting. The years of my wandering had made me a man.”

## XVII

### H. W. NEVINSON

THE first words I heard in the *Daily News* office, as I climbed the stone stairs to see H. W. Smith were these, spoken in a manly jubilant voice, apparently from a cupboard : "Has anybody seen my trousers?" This made me think that journalism was an adventurous career (though, as a fact, it was Hodgson, looking for the office dress-suit) and subsequent events have confirmed the impression. I had no doubt about it when I saw H. W. Nevinson, tall, slender, and stately, and grave with the gravity of many wars, pace down the corridor.

By the bye, why did they never make Henry Nevinson a knight? The answer is, I suppose, that nobody thought it necessary. Years ago the Master of all good knights gave Henry the accolade when he first drew his sword.

Do you know the tale told of him by W. A. Moore in *The Miracle*? Everybody knew it once, but time passes, and the world forgets. The other day I suggested that I should interview Nevinson. "What, the artist?" said the editor. "No," said I, fuming slightly, "H. W. Nevinson, the greatest war correspondent of modern times." The editor frowned thoughtfully. "Oh, yes," he said at length. "The father of the artist, isn't he?" I told him he was misinformed; the artist was H. W. Nevinson's son.

So perhaps you have never heard Moore's fable, "fantastic," perhaps, as H. W. says with a smile and a lift of the eyebrows, but yet as true as death and chivalry. Anyhow, I'll tell you.

Moore pictures Nevinson in battle, and shows him riding towards the enemy waving a cane and crying : “*Cras amet qui nunquam amavit cras amet*”—“tomorrow let him love who has never loved, and who has loved let him love to-morrow !”—and so disappearing from mortal ken. Yes, so he has ridden and rides, shouting his war-cry, always with his face to the enemy. When he disappears there will be a silence.

I said to that editor : “If you didn’t know that H.W. was a war correspondent, you might at least remember that the man can write.” The editor snorted good-humouredly—he’s a decent fellow. “My dear W.R.T.,” he said, “I’m an editor. What the blazes do you think I care about writing ?”

But there was another editor, of a real paper, a weekly review, who cared. He paid me the biggest compliment of my life. He said : “Do you know, I think there’s only one man in London writes better impressions of things seen than you ?”

“H. W. Nevinson ?” I asked. The editor nodded, and I glowed.

For in between his many campaigns the man has written—Lord knows how—sheaves of exquisite impressions, sheaves of fine essays, sheaves of knightly leaders, and a shelf-full of great books.

At the *Daily News* I did not approach him. I did not dare. If I had been told to interview him I should have done it—well, of course. But, though I was on chatting terms with Brailsford and chummy terms with S. K. Ratcliffe, his fellow-leader-writers, the legends of H.W.’s wars stood like a guard around him. And yet he looked, and—as I afterward found, he *was*—so gentle.

You see, I admired him tremendously. And he never disappointed me. It was round about this time that he did as knightly a deed as any of his deeds in battle. Well, Brailsford did the same thing, but then Brailsford wasn’t my hero. They resigned their

appointments because they thought the paper had been unjust to the woman suffragists.

The next time I met Nevinson was at Wells's in Church Row, Hampstead. I've told you about that, haven't I? How H.W. took part with Wells and the rest of us in riotous charades! No, not riotous! That adjective doesn't march with H.W. Jolly! And a very jolly simple fellow I found him to be. But always grave, even in his smiling.

I heard a lot of him, too, from Joe Clayton, and I met him once or twice at Joe's Hampstead house. Joe was another gentle fellow who had been a great fighter. He got taken up in the pro-Boer riots, though that was because a hooligan had hit him. And he was one of the most vehement and logical orators the Socialists ever had.

In the old days Joe had enlisted in the Volunteers, so as to be ready drilled for the revolution. And when the Great War came he joined up at once, though forty-eight and a bittock, for Imperial service. He fought, too, for the suffragists.

That's the sort of fellow Joe was, and is. Yet his life was gentle—he wrote histories—and to see the two gentle fellows together, Joe chaffing, and H.W. smiling gravely, was a marvel.

(Margaret Clayton, great woman, bustling about, and giving her husband and their friend a motherly, determined look as she served them with tea.)

Then I lost sight of H.W., and came in touch with him years later when I was getting up a debate on Galsworthy's play, "The Forest," at the St. Martin's Theatre. I had a good panel of speakers: Chesterton, Belloc, Conal O'Riordan, and they all spoke well. But Nevinson, though he spoke in a low voice and without oratory—I couldn't imagine him orating—had the vital things to say.

For he had been through the African forest and he knew what lurked in it—fever and famine and thirst, and wild beasts, and poisoned arrows that flew softly

from the dark, and the dull drum of the tom-toms from afar. And he knew how White Commerce came with guns to wring a profit from the black men and the black jungle, and leave death behind.

As he spoke you saw that jungle, with the gentle knight striding through it, judging dispassionately, for all the passion that was aroused in him, and recording his judgment implacably. There was a hush upon the house.

He did not tell us then, but he told me later, how when he was investigating the allegations of a slave-trade from Central Africa to Portuguese territory, an attempt was made to poison him. "But," he said with a gentle smile, "they did not quite succeed."

I have seen him a number of times during the past two years up at Hampstead, where he lives and his father lived before him. He is still as straight as a pine-tree, for all his seventy-six years. He is still knightly, though more gentle than ever. And his white hair shines like the oriflamme of war. Though the glance is steady, and the moustache and imperial and the mouth behind them are steady and strong, there is a strange shyness, hesitancy in his manner. Like Don Quixote, this dreamer went to battle, and would go again if need was. Only he does not tilt at windmills.

Well, he was fifty-eight when he went out to the Great War.

"Yes," says Nevinson. "That was a more dreadful war than any other. I began my campaigns when they used black powder, and every time you fired you were seen. Indeed, until the Boers taught us to take cover, we marched bravely into the open to be shot at."

During the Boer War he was shut up in Ladysmith. And that was a real siege. "Towards the end," says H.W., "we existed on a little bit of horse-flesh and a handful of meal a day. The men could not keep upright, they sagged at the knees; and when

we were relieved they were too weak to pursue the enemy."

From 1914 on he saw service in France, in Flanders, on the Dardanelles, at Salonika, and finally in Germany at Cologne. Once in France a shell-splinter took the top of his head off. The doctor said: "Yes, you've cracked your skull; I shall have to put in a bit of silver."—"Nonsense," said Nevinson. "You don't know how hard my skull is; it's impervious to anything but reason." He was quite right. "In a fortnight," says H.W., "I was running about quite happily."

That hardness of skull derives, we may suppose, from Nevinson the highwayman, the only one of his many notable ancestors of whom he is truly proud. It wasn't Dick Turpin, it was Nevinson who rode Black Bess from London to York. And H.W. likes to show you the fetters that the outlaw wore in gaol.

And perhaps it was because of that ancestral memory that as a boy H.W. had a passionate longing for the wilderness, for riding and riding. . . . Or walking. His mother thought he would come to be a hermit and live among the rocks. He wouldn't have minded. But a wandering tinker's would have been the life for him.

It is a curious fact that he was forty before he saw battle—and before he became a working-journalist. For a time he had been living down in Petticoat Lane, so as to be near Canon Samuel Barnett and Toynbee Hall. "I and many others round me," he says, "were simultaneously and almost equally attracted by the soldier, enthusiastic for the rebel, clamorous for the poor, and devoted to the beautiful." He had formed a Cadet Corps for boys at Shadwell, and taken the Guards' Officers' course to equip himself to command them.

So that he was ready primed to take fire at the persecution of the Greeks in Crete in 1897. There was a great public meeting at which the speakers let loose

the lightning of indignation, passed some resolutions, and were about to disperse with nothing done. But Nevinson couldn't take that sitting down. He jumped on a chair, and proposed that if they meant what they said they should send a legion out to fight the Turk. But his intervention was regarded as indecorous.

However Nevinson's fire was blazing. He tried to form his legion, and failed. Then, on Sunday, March 14, 1897, hearing that Captain Callum Birch and one or two others were starting the next day for Athens, he determined to go at all costs. He went, with a commission from H. W. Massingham to write letters from the Front to the *Daily Chronicle* if there should be war.

He went, and there was war, and he wrote. And there I'll leave him, riding towards the enemy and crying: "To-morrow let him love who has never loved, and who has loved let him love to-morrow." For who shall tell in a brief chapter the story of his campaigns? And are they not in the *Chronicles*?

"Oh, yes," said H.W., when I talked of the great legend, "I remember. It was always difficult to live up to . . . and in a tank it was impossible."

Nevinson had a notable wife, and like him Margaret Wynne Nevinson was a fighter. She was notable for her learning and her writing, but still more for her public speaking, and most of all for her work as Councillor and *Guardian* and as Justice of the Peace. She died this year; they were the comrades of a lifetime. How shall he who has loved love to-morrow?

But the old man will write on, and if another war calls him he will be ready. Too old? Nonsense! Six years ago—when he was seventy—he was out in Syria. And the desert they were traversing had been changed by rain to a quagmire. They had five motor-cars with them (three laden with the mails) and H.W. helped to haul and push them through, and dig them out of the quag. "When we reached our journey's end," says Nevinson, "I was encased in mud, and I

looked like one of Rodin's statues. The drivers went up to H.Q. to report and they said: 'Look here! Whatever happens we must keep old Bill as a digger on the staff.'"

"I've written enough books to fill a shelf," says Nevinson. "But it's the pat on the back I got in Syria six years ago that makes me proud."

## XVIII

### BASIL DEAN

THE first time I saw Basil Dean was at a dress rehearsal in the Scala Theatre. He was hopping about the house, appearing here and there in a ghostly way, and shouting occasional remarks at the actors on the stage. And on the stage an imperious lady was taking the juvenile ballet in hand, as if they were recruits and she the sergeant-major, and making loud unkind remarks to the grown-up actors. The show was "Fifinella." Dean was part-author as well as producer. But he had no chance with the ballet-mistress.

After hours of this, the rehearsal faded out, and Mervin Macpherson, the Press agent, took the critics away to feed them on champagne. Whenever the management would let him, Mervin fed the Press on champagne.

A year or so later Alec Rea and Dean took the St. Martin's; and while we were having drinks of a first-night in the Press Room upstairs we would see Dean pass along the passage, with a longing, worried look over his shoulder at us as he went. I thought him a shy bird.

But certainly he could produce plays. There was "The Skin Game," there was "A Bill of Divorcement," there was "Loyalties,"—perfectly acted, perfectly produced. No stars, you know, no over-emphasis to make an entrance or a scene or an exit for the great So-and-so. Everybody and everything had its just importance and proportions, and fitted into the rhythmically changing picture.

And he had discovered a great young actress,

though neither he nor she wanted her to be a star. Meggie Albanesi! Perhaps young playgoers have never heard of her. But anybody who saw and heard her will be thrilled to recall her name.

Thrill and magic are two over-used words. But I have to use them when I write of Meggie Albanesi. Her every quiet, queenly gesture was thrilling; every sad, gentle, heroic tone. And there was magic in her presence, even when she stood silent and still. Short and slender, a wisp of a thing, she was yet the only actress of my time made in the heroic mould.

And the marvel of it was that she fitted better than exactly into Dean's production-scheme.

The truth was, as he told me afterwards, that she knew what he wanted without the telling, their minds worked on the same plane and in the same direction. Whether she had a big part or a little one, with her in the cast Dean felt safe.

When, after a long spell of successes, "The Great Broxxop" failed, Dean intended to stage a play called "Confession," with Meggie in the leading rôle. But Meggie fell ill, and Dean altered his mind.

It was at this time that I came to the St. Martin's as Press agent. I had lost my job as dramatic critic, the editor declaring that what his public wanted was, not criticism, but personal pars. about stars. So I felt that I could better feed my family and my liking for the stage by helping to make known the work of this fine producer.

I saw Dean, and he told me not to expect a huge salary. The St. Martin's was a workshop, where every workman was an enthusiast for his job. I must be content with enough to keep me going. My job would be my real reward.

Well, I was young enough to like that way of talking, and I became Dean's Press agent for six pounds a week. But as a matter of fact it was Papa Clift, the manager of the theatre, who settled the terms.

Dean really impressed me. When he talked of his

workshop his eyes lit up behind the horn-rimmed spectacles, and there was a hushed eagerness in his voice, as though the theatre was a religion. But when I said I shared his enthusiasm he nodded approvingly, but grinned savagely and good-humouredly as if he knew all about that. All the same he assumed from that moment that I was a devotee. Well, I had no option.

For a day or two the first rehearsals of "Confession" proceeded. Then, when it was clear that Meggie would not be well in time for the new show, we settled down seriously to "R.U.R."

I dare say that, if you haven't seen the Capek play, which introduced the word Robot into the language, you've heard of it. It is a terrific thing. It makes you feel that it is more than a stage-piece, and that you are watching this familiar everyday life of ours at first threatened and then destroyed by the machines. E. A. Baughan wrote of his reaction to the first public performance: "Coming out of the theatre, I looked about me in the streets, and saw everywhere Robots."

The moral of the play was the one we Distributists had been preaching, and which the present collapse of mechanical civilisation has brought home to the world. This gave purpose and impetus to my work and a special significance to the rehearsals, out of which I saw gradually emerge the tremendous meaning of the play.

But all the more did the work of Dean fascinate me. The players seemed to know little about it (except Brember Wills, and he knew too much). They were puppets—humans and Robots alike—and Dean manœuvred them. He breathed the life of the play into them, gave meaning and rhythm to their gestures and their tones. There was a flame in him that leapt from the empty auditorium to the empty stage. And the changes were so slight that only when I saw the effect did I see how they mattered. That was the marvellous thing. He carried the pictures of the com-

pleted production in his mind, so that he could shape and fit the actors into the fragments they rehearsed. I sat and marvelled.

And he did it with such limitless patience. I had heard rumours of his brutal ways with actors, how he made strong women tremble and weak men burst into tears. At those first rehearsals I saw nothing of that. I saw only how Dean went back over the scene again and again—jumped on the stage himself perhaps to give the right movement or intonation, until the thing was right.

Then suddenly one afternoon he flared, and it was frightening. The actors had grown casual, and the scene had *dropped*. There was a flash and roar from a face that grinned like a tiger's, the actors shivered as though the electric current had passed through them. Then work was quietly resumed.

When the rehearsal was over, Dean put his hand on my shoulder with a good-humoured smile, and said: "Well, Titterton, what do you think of it?" But he had turned away to shout a command to Albert Jones, the stage-carpenter, before I had finished my reply.

Albert Jones, huge and gruff with a twinkling eye, good-humoured, blasphemous, and efficient! Well, all Dean's men were efficient—Appleford and Veness the electricians, Morgan the property-master, and the rest. Dean had the best stage-staff in London. And I met them all at the little pub. across the road.

Mrs. Alcock was a good landlady, and had a little room for us, where we drank, smoked, and talked round a scarred oblong table. There was Bernard Ince, the stage-manager, and John Brown, the box-office-keeper, and above all George Harris, greatest of all stage-designers.

Dean owed as much to Harris as he did to Meggie. Harris was the only man whose advice he took. He'd say: "George, what do you think of that?" And Harris would either say: "Not so bad," or turn his

sinister glance on Dean, and remark sweetly : "Basil, it's —— awful."

In fact, that was how their friendship began. When Dean was running the Liverpool Repertory Theatre before the War, some slight scenic job needed to be done, and they called in a man from a local studio. The man arrived, took a one-eyed glance at the *cloths*, remarked : "Good Lord, who did that?" removed his coat, and proceeded to re-paint the *cloths*. It was George Harris.

He was very lean and very quiet, even in his infrequent explosions. With that queer eye of his, his glance was really wicked. His wit, uttered so mildly, could be blasting. And he was the merriest, kindest, most courteous, and best-hearted man alive.

Also he was a born democrat. He could not help having the same manner for Alec Rea, the rich ship-owner, for Dean, for the cast, for Jones, for the stage-hands, for the harmless necessary author.

No doubt Harris helped to fire that joyous gathering at Mrs. Alcock's which presently some of the actors joined—notably Banks and Mollison, a gathering the like of which I have never met since on the skirts of a West End theatre. But I knew that Dean was the cause of it. For we all had the air of taking a breather from work that we loved.

Of course we cursed Dean. He wanted twenty-four hours' work a day out of you. Because he never got tired, you were never to be tired. Because he had no use for private life—home or the primrose path—you were to have no private life. But we loved our workshop, and we were proud of our chief. When some other producer's name was mentioned we used to smile at each other. "Cocfair," indeed!

Then the first-night happened, and I noticed that John Brown, who would entertain the *Libraries* (the ticket-agents) while I entertained the Press, had got in a large consignment of beer. Marvelling at the predominance of long drinks, so difficult to deal with in

a short interval, I questioned him. Oh, that was mainly for the staff. Dean drank with his staff after every first-night.

So I was not surprised, after the show, to see Jones, Appleford, Morgan, old Burley the stage-doorkeeper, Tubby Weedon the billposter, Buckingham the commissionnaire, Sollis the fireman, and all the others, crowding into one of the little office-rooms.

And then Dean skipped in, gay and boyish—a Dean I had never seen before. He had a joke and a merry jibe for everybody; and Harris who had drifted in unobserved provided now and then a sardonic anti-climax. We had stories, some improper, but discreetly so, because my wife was there. We had songs from Tubby, who thought himself a comedian, and from me, who thought myself a minstrel; and Tubby and I were both jollied, especially by Harris, on the miserable results. Mr. Rea dropped in with a bright word or two, but did not stay. It was Dean's night, with the men that he knew and trusted.

There is no other manager in London, perhaps there is none in the world, who makes merry with his stage-staff on equal terms. Later on when Dean was doing a show at another theatre, the house Press agent said to me in horror: "The stage-hands coming up to drink with us? Good Lord! Anyhow, I shan't be there." The stage-hands came up—well, three of them. And a managerial person tried to insult them.

When Dean put the names of his stage-staff on the back of his programme people scoffed. But we in the workshop understood.

Oh, I'd just been given a pound extra a week to edit the Reandean *News-Sheet*, a publication of which I am proud. Later on the Secretary of the Theatre Guild of America wrote asking me how I managed to do it. Dean was bucked when I showed him that letter.

Half the success of the *News-Sheet* was due to George Harris, who did thumb-nail sketches for it—marvellous stuff. He could have made a great name

as a Press caricaturist, if he'd wanted to. But he loved the stage—his father had apprenticed him to the paint-room. Macintosh of Miles printed the sheet, with the loving care of an artist. I suppose another half of the success was due to him.

The *News-Sheet* was bound up with the programme of the play, which it helped to sell. Yet we had the devil's own job to get Westby's to let us issue it. Westby (George Dance) is a firm which runs the bars and programmes of many London theatres; they have a long lease of some of them, and they are surer of a profit than anybody else in the trade.

Dean had what he called a semi-permanent company at the St. Martin's—that is, he built his cast round a nucleus of actors, mostly young, who were always with him. That was one reason why his shows always had character. And what a school it was ! Clifford Mollison, Leslie Banks, Mary Clare, Olga Lindo, Ian Hunter, Hermione Baddeley, Malcolm Keen, Beatrix Thomson, Leslie Perrin, Alan Howland (Uncle Columbus) were all at school with Dean, and he changed Edna Best from a flapper to an actress.

There was the same feeling among the actors that there was among the staff. They'd say that Dean was a bully—he could be, when it was necessary. But they would work for him more zealously and gladly than for any other man. Well, look at the Playbox !

Dean decided to run a series of plays of an afternoon, three times a week, and two weeks for each play. That meant that you rehearsed every morning, and played twice a day—for on the other afternoons there were matinées of the evening shows. Hard work ! And he called it the Playbox ! But, grumble as the actors might at times, the actors loved the continual practice of the great game.

As for Dean, he rollicked in it. He lived for rehearsals. When a play was produced he lost interest in it, as a surgeon does with a case after a successful

operation. Long runs annoyed him; he wanted to be at a new script. If only the Playbox had lasted! But the thing was that he got hold of such a dull lot of plays.

I suppose that "Melancholy Holtspur" by John Masefield was the best of the bunch. But "A Magdalen's Husband" would have been a success if Meggie had played in it.

While we were doing "R.U.R." Meggie recovered, and Dean staged "Lilies of the Field" by John Hastings Turner at the Ambassadors, largely, I think, in order to give Meggie a good part. The play had a great success, and John Roberts, Meggie, and Edna Best were fine in it.

It was then, so short a time before she died, that I learnt to know Meggie, and found her as great and dear a creature off the stage as on it. So kind, so blithe, so brave—even when she was suffering, as she so often was, with her throat.

Seeing me to be a sedate elderly person, she used to call me: "Darling Mr. Titterton." "Darling Mr. Titterton," she'd say, resting a thin delicate hand on my arm, "I'm tired." And then when I told her she should rest—she had been rehearsing "A Magdalen's Husband" all the morning—she'd give a defiant toss of her head, and say: "I'll rest when I have to," and light another of those cigarettes. So soon, after that, she rested! So soon that bright spark was quenched!

Those rehearsals of the "Magdalen" were wonderful. The play was faulty, but Meggie felt her part more than ever she had felt a part before. Every tiniest scene she had with Ian Hunter was—well, overwhelming. And you are to understand that this was in an empty house on an empty stage, no scenery, no props., no stage-dresses, no footlights, no audience, nothing. The actors got up from their seats in the wings, and came centre to do their bits.

This was the authentic voice of baffled passion and sorrow. It cut me to the heart, tears trickled down

my face in the dark as the young voice, clear, yet with a husky throb in it, rose and filled the world. And yet the voice was triumphant, triumphant in its beauty, triumphant in its courage. It tore the heart, yet it consoled.

Everybody was saying : "This will be far and away the biggest thing Meggie has done." I'm sure Dean thought so. And Meggie, sick to death, went on rehearsing rather than disappoint him. The play was to be produced the very next week.

I think her last rehearsal was on Wednesday or Thursday morning. As far as I can remember she played at the Ambassadors on Thursday evening. On Sunday I heard that she was dead.

I, of all those connected with the theatre, was the first to hear of it. And for hours I was at the St. Martin's trying to get in touch with Rea, Dean, and Clift. The Press had to be informed, too. And again and again I repeated the formula: "I regret to say. . . ."

Every now and then a call from a newspaper came in, and a bright young reporter asked for materials to make an interesting story. I don't blame him, but it hurt. One or two of the bright young reporters, annoyed by my curtness over the telephone, came round to the theatre. Well, though they were a nuisance, they were company. For in those usually crowded offices I sat and telephoned, telephoned, telephoned alone.

My wife had much the same experience in our flat. The death of Meggie Albanesi was a first-class story.

Late that night I got hold of Rea, Dean, and Clift. I met them at Rea's house in Stratton Street. And after the news was told they sat silent for a long while, making no sign. Then somebody had the sense to say we must cancel the announcements of "A Magdalen's Husband" and we got busy. I left Dean sitting silent, looking at the floor.

Dean never got over the death of Meggie. They

were no more than producer and actress to each other. She did not exist for him outside the theatre. But inside it she was his inspiration. In time he recovered his old gusto, but I think he had lost his aim.

Nevertheless, it was after this that Dean put on his most spectacular production—"Hassan," at His Majesty's. I was specially interested in the play, because I had recited some of my own verse the same night that Flecker gave us some of his, many years before at a Fabian Summer School. And I remembered very clearly the eager, ironical, black-haired fellow with the swarthy skin and the burning eyes.

Dean had had the play by him for a long while. He had dreamt of producing it, while he was fiddling about on the tiny St. Martin's stage where he had scored his big successes. As for the Ambassadors, it was, not a Playbox, but a bandbox. He felt he needed space to spread himself. And now he had this huge stage at His Majesty's.

The production was praised and damned in superlatives. In fact, it was a fine show; though I shall always think that Dean is at his splendid best in modern comedy played in a small theatre, where the tiniest gesture counts.

He is at his best, too, when moulding malleable young actors. The stars in the cast of "Hassan" proved less tractable. And Ainley, fine as he was, seemed quite insurgent.

Well, there are two main styles of production. It is not my business here to judge between them. But established actors with strong personalities do not fit in to Dean's style.

The next news was that Dean was to produce plays with Butt at the Queen's, and that Butt was going to instal the Schwabe-Hasait lighting there.

Goodness gracious! I haven't mentioned the Schwabe-Hasait lighting, which you had to learn to pronounce and even to spell, if you were Dean's

Press agent, use if you were his electrician, and pay for if you were his backer.

It was a costly business, and certainly at the St. Martin's it produced some very pretty results. But the game wasn't worth the battens, and no play was helped much by it. Certainly Butt was mad to weight the Queen's with the cost. But "Hassan" had convinced Butt that Dean was *the* producer—ultimately the producer for Drury Lane. And you must give rope to a genius. Butt gave Dean rope.

So now for a time Dean had three theatres. And the night of his pride was when he marched Clift, Roger Ould, the play-reader and assistant-manager, and myself on a tour of inspection from stage to stage. Clift pinched his nose from time to time and looked amused; Roger Ould, who had been Secretary to the Governor of Fiji, preserved the right respectful indifference; and I . . . but what I thought didn't count. So we paraded—Dean casting his eyes left and right with the glance of a . . . Well, the stage-carpenter put it best who, as we walked in single file through the pass-door, saluted, and said: "All correct, sir."

Dean, by the way, had been a captain in the Army, as director of entertainments.

But it was not quite that Dean was getting back the Army touch. One day at Mrs. Alcock's I said to Harris, apropos of great men: "A great man ceases to be one when he comes down to breakfast in an ornamental waistcoat." And Harris said, with a twist of his lips, and his baleful eye fixed on me: "He's got it on this morning." And, lo and behold! when I dropped into the rehearsal, Dean was clad in a decorative pull-over!

He took the decorative pull-over, symbolically at least, to Drury Lane. I remember how he had me into the St. Martin's bar for a drink, and told me in an exultant undertone that he was going to the Lane, and what it meant to him to be the manager and producer

in this home of English drama. The things that he—no, “we” would do there! Things worthy of the National Theatre, not mere melodramatic bunk. This was his big chance, and I would help him to take it, wouldn’t I? I would do my best? I nodded. He knew.

Well, we went to the Lane, and Dean asked time to get ready. But there were shareholders, with directors to represent them, and shareholders are always in a hurry. So Dean, against his own judgment, rushed on “London Life.” It is not a good play, and, despite the marvellous production, it failed.

But Dean’s “Midsummer Night’s Dream” was a wonder piece. Some of the critics complained that Dean made it a musical-comedy. Well, so did Shakespeare—the best musical-comedy going.

I contributed to the musical-comedy. Dean introduced some things of Mendelssohn’s from “Songs Without Words,” and I wrote the words. But Dean wouldn’t put “additional lyrics by W. R. Titterton” on the bill.

There was nearly a complete catastrophe on the first-night. A *bridge* (part of the stage capable of being raised above or dropped below the general stage-level) carried a fairy hill, which was to be raised behind the drop-cloth that backed the final scene. When the drop vanished the fairy hill would be there.

But on the first-night, for the first and only time, the bridge stuck, nobody ever knew why. Fairies were clustered on it, some above, some below the stage-level. And their entrance was due in about a minute. If they didn’t come on the *dénouement* would be wrecked.

However, Dean’s men whom he had brought to the theatre, Jones and Morgan, weren’t beaten yet. They helped fairies up or down, each ran with a cluster round the neck to an alternative entrance in the wings, and came back for more until all the fairies were disposed of.

The fairies made their entrance, the drop was never raised, and nobody in front knew there had been an accident.

Dean had a drink with Jones and Morgan on the strength of it. And they deserved it. But, well, you had to back up Dean.

He achieved a miracle by running Shakespeare in that huge theatre at a profit for nearly three months. And if he had stayed there he would have done greater things. But the directors had other ideas. They wanted their "Rose Marie," and they got it, and made a pile of money. Dean packed up, and his men with him—except Abingdon, the stage-manager. And Dean went away to do great work elsewhere. But I think he left his decorative pull-over behind him.

"Thank you, old man, for all you've done," said Dean at the dress-rehearsal of the "Dream." "You've done wonders." I laughed. I had had one or two, because my work was ended. "Yes," I said, calling him *Basil* for the first and last time—I always *Mister* and *Sir* my boss in self-protection. "Yes, Basil, it's queer. You're so —— rude, and yet we work our guts out for you." Dean smiled faintly, and raised his eyebrows. "Rude?" he said, in naïve surprise. "Am I rude?" And then I roared.

Well, I haven't made much of his rudeness here, because it has become a legend, and the legend is miles from the truth. I always found him a very lovable man, no, a boy. Headstrong and egotistical if you like, but a good companion, a good boss. And, by Jove, he always appreciated the marvellous help he always got.

He's wasting his time on films just now, making good ones no doubt, and liking to see the wheels go round. But films are not his meat. He'll come back, oh, yes, he'll come back to the theatre, his first and only love.

## XIX

### AUGUSTUS JOHN

I HAVE met John—upon a number of occasions—but I should hesitate to say that I know him, had he not, by remarks made to other people, shown that he thinks that he knows me. So here goes.

The first time that I saw John was at one of his exhibitions—the private show. He was standing, magnificent in his high soft hat, cloak and beard—smiling, negligent, almost insolently at ease. Admirers frothed round him. He was perfectly got up, and perfectly posed. I murmured to my companion: “‘The Gipsy,’ by Augustus John.” And yet I realised clearly that the man was not in the usual sense of the word *posing*. He knew he was a striking figure, and he made the most of himself. But he did not care a damn what you thought of his self-portrait. And, as a matter of fact, he was, he is, a gipsy.

That is why the Bohemians, the pseudo-gipsies, find him so embarrassing. Their gipsydom is at worst a silly affectation, at best an unrehearsed but pleasant result of obsession by their work. But John has it in the blood. You feel that at any moment he might take the road again, and leave his unfinished sketches and his dirty dishes behind him.

When I met John in Chelsea, I noticed that nobody talked art to him, above all nobody talked about his (John’s) work. And they told me that if somebody had done so he would have exploded. You would almost conclude that he wasn’t proud of being an artist. Anyhow, he is far prouder of his huge voice,

and yet prouder of his huge muscles. For John is not only a very big man, he is a very strong one.

One evening at a *do*, an Irishman whom I will call Billy Mac, watched entranced while John did some feats of strength. When the turn was over he went up to John and felt his muscles.

“They tell me,” said Billy, “that your name’s John, and that you paint for a living.” It was the “*and decorating*” sort of painting that Billy meant—and John did not undeceive him.

“Then let me tell you,” says Billy, “that you’re wasting your time. It’s a great name you might make for yourself in the Ring; will you do it? I’ll back you.”

It is plain from John’s continued devotion to the painting and decorating business that he declined the seductive offer. But I am sure that John wavered. And lately I have wondered what Billy’s offer had to do, one way and another, with the temporary adoption of a fighting career by John’s son.

I said that John has given signs that he thought he knew me. One sign was this: Eddie Morrow did a sketch of me and showed it to John. “Yes,” said John, “you caught the poet, but you’ve missed out the vegetarian.” Eddie insisted that I wasn’t a vegetarian. “Well, he ought to be,” said John.

When Eddie told me this, I was not angered, but saddened; for I felt that John must be right.

He always is in that way. You remember the case of Lord Leverhulme’s portrait. So I won’t tell you. But you may not have heard the story about Lloyd George. Lloyd George commissioned John to paint his portrait, and when the picture was finished looked at it with vast disfavour.

“Do you know, Mr. John,” he said, “you’ve made me look like a butcher.”

“Let’s have a look at you,” said John, gave him that curious glance of his, emptied of all but light,

and concluded : " Yes, and by God, you look like a butcher ! "

Shortly after that Mr. Lloyd George was painted by a Welsh artist, a Welsh artist, I mean, who was as much Welsh as artist, and who was not a gipsy.

A certain celebrated actress once had the fancy to have her likeness took, and said as much to a man—we will call him *the NOB*—in whom she took some interest.

He said : " All right, my dear, who'd ye like to do it ? "

Said she : " Oh, well, I'd like the best man. What about Einstein ? "

The Nob laughed. " My dear child," he said, " he's a sculptor. But as a matter of fact I don't know who is the swell guy just now. I'll drop in at the stable, and inquire at the horse's mouth."

He did, and came back with the news that the swell guy was John.

So the Nob tooted the actress down to Chelsea, and they knocked at John's front door. A boy opened it, and in reply to an inquiry as to the whereabouts of Mr. Augustus John, said : " Father's at the ' Six Bells.' Come in ! "

They went in, and the Nob's chauffeur was sent to collect John.

Having found the " Six Bells," he popped his head inside the saloon bar, and asked if Mr. John was there.

" Come in," said John. The chauffeur came in.

Now, whether the chauffeur had been hitherto a tee-totaler, or was extremely tired, or each artist present stood him a drink in quick succession, I don't know. The ascertainable fact is that when it was time to go the chauffeur was sleeping peacefully upon the floor—not drunk, of course, but sound asleep.

John looked down at him, and asked if he belonged to anybody there, and then it was remembered that the stranger had asked for John.

So John had him hoisted on his back, and took him home. Arrived there, he decanted his burden on the floor of his sitting-room at the feet of an extremely wrathful person—the Nob.

After stating in violent terms that he had been waiting for over an hour, the Nob said that he had brought the actress down for John to paint.

“No,” said John, whose blood was up at the Nob’s insulting behaviour. “I don’t paint what’s painted already.”

“But, Mr. John,” said the actress sweetly, “you will do it for me. You know me. I’m Flossie Two-steps.”

“Never heard of you,” said John, obstinately.

So the Nob took the actress away, very sorrowful, and even angrier.

But later on Flossie came down to Chelsea by herself, and John did a sketch of her for nothing.

One thing I should like to know, and have never found out. John was a close friend of de Vere Cole, the best practical joker of all time. It was a usual thing to see them together at a Chelsea studio party. And the sight of them at rest made me wonder if ever they had been together in action.

I mean, had John anything to do with the design or execution of that inspection of the British Fleet by *An Eastern Potentate*? Was John one of the workmen when de Vere Cole staked out and navvied up a section of a main London thoroughfare, the police meanwhile diverting the traffic? And so on! All de Vere Cole’s sprees must have been mightily to John’s mind. I wonder. Yet we can’t build too much upon that; since it was this very community of naughtiness that made them friends.

However, there is one incident, which is almost evidence: Once on a time I was sent to interview a Welsh gipsy, Matthew Wood, who was to be found in a village entirely surrounded by impassable mountains. I found him there in the custody of Dr. Samp-

son, who was a professor at a Lancashire University, but spent his treasured hours worming folklore out of Welsh gipsies. When he had consented to believe that I was not a rival folkloreist, seeking to rob him of Matthew, he settled down to the conviction that John had sent me there to play him a practical joke. "All the way from London?" I asked. "Yes," said Sampson. "John would do that."

John is, in society, a very silent man. That is, if you will not let him sing. I remember once in Norman Morrow's studio just before *the Trouble* meeting all the Sinn Fein leaders, and John was there.

There was a brisk discussion on Ireland. My contribution to it was the remark that, being an Englishman, I had no opinion on the subject, except that I wanted Ireland to get her independence, so that England would be rid of her, and would have time to look after her own affairs.

That amused the Sinn Feiners more than it deserved, and a smile passed over John's face. As far as I can remember, it was his nearest approach to conversation.

John owed a good deal to his first wife, Ada Nettleship—daughter of the painter. She was a great woman, and the perfect wife, the perfect mother. She treated John's gipsying excursions as a mother treats the truant-playing of a wayward son. And she made John work.

Like all true artists—and John is the pure type—John can be both unutterably lazy and a ferocious worker. Arnold Bennett's begin-at-nine-and-break-for-lunch would drive him mad. When the mood is on him he would work for ever. When the mood is not on him—well, then he will slip off to a Welsh mountain or a Paris café, loaf, and invite his soul—and the soul and body of anybody he happens to meet and to like.

I'm not going to discuss his work, except to say

that obviously John is the biggest modern British painter—one of *the* portrait painters. Apart from his skill as a colourist, there has been no man in modern times, there have been few men in the history of art, who could so put a man's soul upon the canvas. And no silly esoteric fake, either!—all done by straightforward workmanship! Only the man sees more than we see. God! what must he see with those neutral eyes of his (so compelling and yet so rebuffing) out of which everything has faded but the light!

Of recent years I have seen him about a bit at societyish functions that I had to attend as a journalist. He was with society people, and his mane and his beard. . . .

Do you know that John passed through the British Army without having his beard off? I don't know the details, but I know that the Army gave it up as a bad job.

Will Society prove stronger? I wonder. For behold, John's mane and beard have been trimmed. He looks a little less like a gipsy and a little more like a *maestro* now.

Well, how can he help it? He still lives in Chelsea, and the old Chelsea has disappeared. There is no London Bohemia in which a gipsy can live at ease. In the only circles in which he can move nowadays he must be clipped or uncomfortable. So he has clipped. As I have said, the wildness was never a pose, but merely an expression of the natural man.

I should very much like to know something about John—apart from the superficial facts that he is an irresponsible boy and an immortal artist. I don't know; I wonder if his friends, if even his intimate friends know. I wonder if anybody ever knew except Ada Nettleship. He is such a simple fellow that his secret cannot be guessed. If he has a secret! That is the doubt which tantalises you.

In my tramps abroad I have seen gipsies and other strong vagabonds lounging in the open air; as I

passed they have turned their insolent eyes on me, and a jest on me has passed with a laugh from one to the other. *They* had a secret, hinted at by their lithe slow gestures and the animal grace even of their wide-mouthed jaws. But the secret was incommunicable.

## XX

### GANDHI

I WAS told to be at Kingsley Hall, Bow, at some unearthly hour—something like half-past six, I think. But when I got there I found the Hall deserted. The policeman on guard outside told me that Mr. Gandhi had gone out for a walk with his procession some time before. I noticed in the sergeant a mixture of amusement and respect for this bare beggar whom they guarded like a king.

After a while the sergeant said in an undertone: “There they come!” And round the corner sauntered the procession.

Gandhi was in front, a cloth flung round him, his spectacles gleaming above his broken-toothed smile. He was talking to an Indian in European dress, but with a tarbush on his head. Other Indians similarly clad followed. Among them was a white woman in Indian dress, with her fine eyes fixed on the master.

I expected to see Gandhi chi-iked. But the few people that were about took him for granted, and gave him no second glance.

When the procession reached the Hall I went up to Gandhi, and he said how sorry he was I had been kept waiting. He had been thinking of the real time, and had forgotten that we English had altered the clock.

So we walked upstairs. And on the way a bright vision in primavera dress dawned on us. It was the Lady of the Hall. With smiling becks and bows and fussing delight she shooed the master on to the roof. I looked back, and saw the white disciple—it was

Shrimati Mira, sometime Madeleine Slade—regarding the Lady of the Hall with concentrated resentment.

For a while the other Indians stood about on the roof. I decided that I did not like them. Even in the rush and hurry of greeting and entrance I had been struck by the serene simplicity of Gandhi. But these hangers-on seemed sophisticated, on the make.

The next moment Gandhi and I are in a cell. A cubicle. A bare box of a room. This is where Gandhi meditates, prays and sleeps.

The spare athletic old man adjusts the white wrap round his shoulders, revealing as he does so a small watch hanging from his loin-cloth.

Then he sits on the bare floor—well, he has a mat, and I have a chair—and gazes up with serene attention.

The eyes are spectacled, but you scarcely notice that. The teeth are broken and few, but that you forget. The glance is tender and yet remote. Very tender, and infinitely remote.

The features are mild but austere. The figure is keenly alive. Yet it is a statue that has come to life, and can at will at any moment become a statue again. You could imagine it taking a handful of human experiences, and watching them placidly as they slipped through the fingers like sand.

Midway in the talk Shrimati Mira, robed and hooded in white, brought into the cell the master's goat's milk, and offered it to him in reverent meekness—then vanished without sound. Begging a moment's pause, the Mahatma bent his head in prayer, and then sipping the milk from a spoon, continued the argument.

I reminded him that in the West it was held that man has the right to freedom in the pursuit of happiness. Was that true of the East?

**GANDHI.** "Yes. In the East as in the West it is held that man should have freedom to seek happiness."

W.R.T. "But where then is that happiness to be found? In excitement?"

GANDHI. "That seems to be the belief of many to-day. Certainly millions of people seek in excitement that state of mind to which we all aspire. But" (with calm finality) "they have lost their way. Not in excitement is happiness to be found, but in contentment."

"Therefore I say that the manifold distractions of modern life, the feverish rushing hither and thither in business or pleasure, instead of giving man happiness, rob him of the power of contemplating, yes, even of contemplating, what happiness really is. There is, you will hear it said, no time to-day for contemplation."

W.R.T. "I agree. The little group to which I belong desire a return to a simpler state of society, where all men will be in touch with real things" (Gandhi smiled benevolently, as though he doubted the reality of my things) "and engaged in the production of necessary commodities."

GANDHI. "Good. That is good. But even in a simpler state of society, with almost all men engaged in the production of necessities, and with recreations springing from, instead of imposed upon the individual, it is impossible to find happiness in the gratification of the senses."

W.R.T. "A Western philosopher might hold that, while surrender to the senses must lead to destruction, yet those senses, properly controlled, may open the door to happiness. For example, the sensuous delight in beauty and the making of beautiful things."

GANDHI (*nodding his head contentedly*). "Yes, I know. And I tell you that this is a delusion.

The things that pass and are forgotten cannot open the door to that which alone endures.

“The most exalted gratification of the senses—I do not speak now of mere intoxications—spreads a veil of illusion between a man and reality. Happiness is always there waiting for him. Waiting. But he must draw back the veil.”

W.R.T. “But surely these things of the senses are of God to be enjoyed.”

GANDHI. “I say they are of God to be used. I use my palate that my food may nourish me. I take food to sustain life.

“The same is true of physical passion. It is to be used if and when we wish to live in our children through another generation.”

(I agreed with him. And yet I shivered.)

GANDHI (*the teacher growing emphatic, becoming the prophet*). “I counsel renunciation. Only when a man has put behind him the things of the senses will the door open and he will see the Way.”

W.R.T. “But a man cannot gain happiness if he is thinking first of his own happiness.”

GANDHI. “Good. That is good.”

W.R.T. “Take a married man. He is happiest when he forgets himself and thinks of his wife and children.”

GANDHI. “That is good. But it is only a step on the way. A man’s family are *his own*. They are an extension of himself. To merge himself in them is something. But you must merge yourself in the great ocean of humanity.”

W.R.T. “Suppose that a married man should find that his duties towards his family conflict with his duties to humanity.”

GANDHI. “When the conflict is sharp the course is clear. Especially is this so with journalists. Therefore I say that a journalist—and in

particular a journalist who expresses opinion—should take the vow of poverty, or change his occupation."

W.R.T. (*smiling to think of a journalist needing to take the vow of poverty*). "That is a counsel of perfection."

GANDHI (*gravely*). "I counsel perfection. But he might make shoes."

W.R.T. "But you believe in marriage."

GANDHI. "I am not at this moment talking of complete renunciation. Marriage is lawful, though not obligatory. It is enough that one man renounce all."

W.R.T. "All philosophers, indeed all men who use their reason, are agreed on the futility of seeking happiness in material possessions."

GANDHI. "Good. That is good."

W.R.T. "But, if we despise wealth as a means of selfish gratification, may it not be a means of making others happy?"

GANDHI. "The answer to that is that if this is your aim, and you have taken the vow of poverty, you can get all the money you need from others. I get all the money I want. At the moment I have more than I need, and to have the money there, even for a little while, is a burden. I like the money to be there only from day to day—given again as soon as received.

"But riches offer a far worse temptation than the mere selfish gratification of the senses, of being able to purchase delights. That temptation is power. Not the power to do good—which I have who am poor. Not the power to make this or that. But power over other men. That is entirely evil. It is the great temptation."

W.R.T. "The happy man is never conscious of his own happiness."

GANDHI. "That is true. The healthy man is not conscious of his health. The good man is not conscious of his goodness. Even the happy philosopher, considering the idea, is no more *aware* of his happiness than a physician is aware of his digestion."

W.R.T. "I take it that self-sacrifice is the highest ideal we know."

GANDHI. "Yes, you are right. We must needs worship the highest. And to make a ledger-account, with self-sacrifice on the one side and happiness on the other would be a denial of the self-sacrifice we worship.

"Freedom!" (He looked at his brown fingers, and human life ran through them.)

"Freedom from self! Freedom in the pursuit of happiness, not for the self we aim to lose, but for humanity in which we merge ourselves. . . . And, in the end, supreme contentment—Peace."

I dared not light my pipe until I was outside Kingsley Hall. But then, by Jove, the tobacco tasted good.

## XXI

### THE BISHOP OF CHELMSFORD

THE Bishop was hovering on the lawn before his door, and he darted out at me as I descended from my cab. If he had known which train I was catching, he said, he would have met me. I told him it was much more charming of him to meet me thus in his fine garden before the steps of his palace.

“Oh, that,” he said, with a deprecating movement of his hands. “That doesn’t belong to me, that belongs to the Bishop, and you’ve come to see Henry Wilson.”

Should we talk in the garden or in the house? In the garden? He seemed relieved. He led me away from the house across the lawn.

In simple and manly fashion he told me there was sickness in the house. They were operating on his son upstairs—now. So that if his attention strayed I must forgive him.

That brought me up short. Why of course I’d come another day. I couldn’t think. . . . But he’d have none of that. As a fact, if I didn’t mind being made a convenience of, the talk would serve to distract his thoughts.

“Yes, I should think so,” said I. But he took my arm, and led me on.

I have to set this down here; for I felt that already he had answered my question. My question was: What are we here for?

In a little while we were sitting side by side on a garden-bench, smoking his tobacco. The greenery—calm, spacious, sedate—swept round and away. In the

distance, embowered, a group of children were busy with a swing. All of it looked very settled and very strong.

The man smoking at my side fascinated me. With his lustrous black hair, bold fearless eyes, and adventurous, humorous mouth, he looked more like a soldier than a cleric; and I had a swift vision of him standing back to back with Alan Beck on a Scottish brae, the claymore out, and foes all round him.

But when I looked down there was no tartan plaidie; though indeed there was a kilt.

Later on the Bishop confessed to me that he was very glad when he was able to abandon trousers.

He plunged into the debate eagerly, even joyously. And yet I am sure that all the while he was fearing to see a sudden messenger come hurrying from the house.

To begin with, I had to tell him that I was not of his persuasion. He nodded. Did my Church satisfy me intellectually? I said that it did. It was obvious from the look he gave me that he thought that strange.

“What are we here for?” he said. “I can’t imagine a question more pertinent. That’s natural; for it is my job to answer it.”

W.R.T. “Well, it seems to me that unless we know why we’re on the earth, we can’t tell what on earth we’re to do.”

THE BISHOP. “Precisely. Every thinking person must have come up against that challenge. Every thinking person must have at least a vague idea that his or her existence requires some justification.”

W.R.T. “We didn’t ask to be born.”

THE BISHOP. “No, though there isn’t any doubt that we should have accepted the offer. Anyhow, here we are. And thinking people have the idea that they have no right to breathe the common air unless they pay their footing on

the earth by some contribution to the common good."

W.R.T. "I see that. Even if this is a shipwreck, the people on the raft have duties towards each other."

THE BISHOP. "This world is a shipwreck only in the sense that man himself has gone astray."

W.R.T. "And so brought death into this world and all our woes."

THE BISHOP. "Which takes us a step farther. For this instinct that we have to pay our footing does not explain why we are here. It only testifies to the fact that all right-minded persons are quite sure that they are not here merely to have a good time—to grab all and give nothing."

"To find the meaning and purpose of life is like working out an algebraic problem, in which you have to discover the value of an unknown quantity—X."

W.R.T. "And X is the very . . . ?"

THE BISHOP (*smiling*). "No, that's exactly what it is not. The statement of the problem runs something like this: A man has to undertake a journey through an unknown land for an unknown distance."

W.R.T. "To an unknown destination?"

THE BISHOP. "We are assuming for the moment that it is unknown. He will have to fight hard for his food every day. He and his are beset with sickness. Struggles of every sort! He finds himself surrounded by multitudes of fellow travellers."

"At any moment he or one of his group of inmates may be struck down. At any moment his heart may be broken and his hopes blasted. It is a continual struggle to keep his head above water."

"Uncertainty is his daily portion, sorrow

of some sort—probably devastating—will in the long run fall upon him. And when he arrives at what looks like the end of the journey, he will fall over a precipice and disappear."

(He looked at me knowingly, and puffed hard at his pipe.)

"Find the reason why the man embarked on that apparently insane journey! What is the value of X?"

W.R.T. "From the evidence you have put before us the answer seems to be: I give it up."

THE BISHOP (*nodding composedly*). "Most people do. Like you, I can find no answer at all from the data given."

He looked at me in silence. In the silence I heard the children laughing round the swing, and seemed to see the surgeon upstairs busy at the operating-table.

"Bring God into it," said the Bishop, knocking his pipe out on his shoe, "and I can work the problem out. It must be God. Mere Providence won't do. It must be a good God, a Father Who loves His children."

W.R.T. "Forgive me! But isn't that begging the question? Life is not worth living unless there is a God. Therefore there is a God."

THE BISHOP. "Oh, but I can prove that there is a God. Why should there be all this beauty around us? Why should the flowers smell sweet? Why should the million-fold sights and sounds of nature delight our senses? And whence comes this deep-rooted instinct in man for goodness, beauty, and truth?"

W.R.T. "There are miasmic swamps and jungles, there are deadly snakes, there are slums, there is injustice, there are wicked men."

THE BISHOP. "That is another problem. Evil exists

of course. But the moral of the whole world is that it has a wise and loving Architect."

W.R.T. "Take a happily married pair! A balk of timber falls on the man's head, and he becomes, let us say, a malicious half-wit, or a jibbering idiot."

THE BISHOP. "If you will excuse me, that seems to be taking only one bit of the problem apart from its context. We act and re-act on each other. You have to consider the effect of this tragedy on the wife, who may have been frivolous, or on the son, who may have been undutiful. The family tragedy may prove to be the salvation of wife or son.

"You have helped me to my point. We are here to form a character. We are amorphous pieces of sentient material which have to be licked into shape by the discipline of life. Therefore, the struggle and the suffering."

W.R.T. "And in the end the precipice?"

THE BISHOP. "Not at all! This life is simply the preface, the testing-place, to ascertain if we are fit for the fuller and richer life hereafter.

"In other words, this life is the grub-stage of humanity. And if we display no capacity for being anything better than grubs, we shall finish up on the eternal rubbish-heap."

W.R.T. "Do you think it matters that the churches are empty?"

THE BISHOP. "It matters very much indeed."

W.R.T. "Is that so because people want to worship, and so few churches are places of worship?"

THE BISHOP. "No. I think it is because the Churches have failed in their contract. They are factories for turning out Christians—men and women with finer characters than the non-

Christians round them. And the goods we deliver aren't up to specification.

"Let people discover that Mr. Brown, of Laburnam Villas, and Mr. White, of Pretoria Parade, and Mr. Smith, of the Larches, are all exceptionally fine fellows and that they're all Christians, and this tremendous advertisement will attract the raw material to the factory."

I reflected that I had known some very good atheists, and I wondered if this definition of Christianity was enough.

Then we were called into lunch, and on the way I asked the delicate question: Did the parish clergy ever tend to spare the feelings of rich and powerful parishioners?

The Bishop grinned at me. "My dear fellow," he said, "it takes all sorts to make a clergy. But I've known striking instances to the contrary. I have known vicars who have risked their happiness and perhaps their incomes by opposing the private or public activities of the local power-that-was."

I knew at least that there would never come a truckle from the stalwart figure trotting at my side.

There was a nurse took lunch with us. She was fresh from the battle upstairs. But Mrs. Wilson, a charming hostess, talked of Fleet Street and the journalists she had met.

When last I went to Bishopsthorpe I was before my time, and the Bishop said he had a call to make in Chelmsford before lunch, would I come with him. We went by field-paths, the Bishop striding along as though he were glad of the outing. Everybody we passed saluted, and the Bishop responded with a smile.

"I have to know them all," he said, "even when I'm outside Chelmsford. And I can't. With the best will I can't. There are so many of them, and not all

of the poor dears have characteristics that help the memory. My clergy? Oh, yes. They run into hundreds—I've a big diocese—but I do manage to remember them all."

We called on the editor of a local newspaper. Portly, urbane, authoritative, he seemed a very king to me who knew the editors of London.

It was the case of a young fellow whom the Bishop was anxious to help. The editor doubted if it would be wise. He had been a good lad, but he had fallen among Communists.

"Well," said the Bishop merrily, "I suppose that even Communists get hungry, and have wives and families to feed."

The editor remained doubtful, and the Bishop sure.

On the way back I asked how the Bishop's big boy was getting on—I had heard before that the operation was quite successful.

"I think I told you that he wished to be a journalist. Well, instead, he is in the Civil Service, and one of his first efforts has been to write a small handbook which has reached a circulation of several million. Now *you* can't beat that."

The question I had to put this time was the one I had already put to Miss Marie Tempest: "What will you say in your last will and testament?"

When, after lunch, we had settled down in the smoking-room, with one of the Bishop's marvellous dogs at our feet, my host looked at me with a quizzical smile.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that my last will and testament won't be an important document. But let's suppose. Let's be extravagant!" He settled himself luxuriously on the sofa. "Let's suppose that I'm a millionaire!"

He paused and laughed. And then turned grave.

"If I were a millionaire I should be afraid of the harm my money might do my children. I think it is a terrible handicap for the young to have wealth with-

out the winning. And so I should leave my money in trust. Bequeath to my sons a living income of five pounds a week each, and set down that for every pound earned another pound should be given them. That would act as a spur."

W.R.T. "But suppose one of them chose a career more honourable than lucrative."

THE BISHOP. "Yes, I foresee that possibility. A writer or an artist might think more of his craft than of the market. I should take care that he did not suffer from that."

W.R.T. "And what advice would you give?"

THE BISHOP. "Is it worth while giving any? I wonder. The young always consider their elders fools—probably dear old fools, but always fools. So what better fate is my testamentary counsel likely to get than a tolerant smile?"

W.R.T. "Yet by the terms of your commission you are a person licensed to give advice."

THE BISHOP (*mournfully*). "I am. Though I would far rather give encouragement or consolation. And I admit that, though the young may at the time scorn the words of their elders, later on, when they have strayed into a blind alley, they might say: 'Well, the dear old fogey was right after all.'

"But I shan't, I mean I shouldn't be such an old fool as to make bitter comparisons between my generation and the next. Recently a cuneiform inscription, deciphered in Constantinople, was found to run something like this: 'Alas for the times! All children have become disobedient to their parents, and the immodesty of the girls passes imagination.' The fact is that one generation always blames the one after it—and the one before.

"More profitable it would be to recall

what things in life are worth striving for and in remembrance stand sure. I might say, then, the only things that matter in life are three—and these the poorest can achieve.

“The first thing is a decent record, which may be interpreted to mean that the nett result of our living is on the credit side. It is the best bequest the father can make; it is a torch handed on.

“The second thing is friendship—the friends we have made and kept, in whose thoughts we shall be well remembered. The third thing is the love we have found.

“These three things make life worth living, and they are the only possessions we shall have for ever.

“I might go on to emphasise the wisdom of seeking that which endures, and so philosophise on the difference between pleasure and happiness—pleasure the momentary gratification of the senses, happiness a permanent state resulting from perfect equipoise. And I might point to physical sufferers who have seldom a moment of pleasure and are yet supremely happy.

“Of course I should not condemn pleasure. I like my pipe and my games. But I might point out that those who live for pleasure die unsatisfied.

“Of my record what could I say to my children—except that I was handed a torch, and I trust with all my heart that it is still burning. But of a surety I should give thanks for the friends I have made and the love I have found.

“And yet, though I have been wonderfully happy, marvellously blessed, I should have to say that if this world were all, life would be a failure.

“I have seen the good borne down and the wicked triumphant. I have seen the innocent suffer agony and the guilty live at ease. I have heard the cry of the hungry child; I have watched the unrewarded patience of the poor.

“If this were all, life would indeed be a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing.

“But I should say in my testament that I know that it is not all, and that heaven will redress the manifold injustices of earth.

“Yet I can see all around me the evidences of eternal justice; I can deduce the perfect circle from the broken arc. But only an idiot or a rascal can be content with this life—without the other that will complete it.

“Yes, it is possible that in great art we feel the perfect behind these imperfections, and certainly we realise it in the courage of simple folk and the loving self-sacrifice of faithful friends. We realise that evil and suffering are transitory, and that these good things endure.

“But we await the divine event—‘from some far shore the final chorus sounding.’ All of us on earth are fighters in a blind battle for something which cannot here be ours, but which will be ours as sure as death if we endure until the end. The battlefield does not make a pretty picture; but heaven is kinder than earth with its ex-Service men.

“And so I may not have offered advice after all. Between you and me, I don’t think I shall. As for my ‘retainers,’ by which word you may be pleased to refer, let us say, to my cook or chauffeur, really, what sort of advice can I offer to them? They know quite well that I am entirely incompetent to advise

her about cooking or to advise him how to clean a car. Much the same may be said of the few others in our domestic economy. If, after having for many years seen me, metaphorically speaking, in my pyjamas, they regard me with some respect and affection—though not, I fear, with veneration—advice will be needless. If they don't, it will be ridiculous.

“And isn't it the same with one's children? Of course it is.”

When we had finished our talk, the Bishop took me down in his tiny car to the station, and inquired at the booking-office about the time of the next train.

“Here's a rich London friend of mine,” he said, “who's venturing on the journey. I hope you'll do your best for him.”

The booking-office clerk grinned, and said he would. And all the porters smiled in friendly fashion on the Bishop. It was clear that all Chelmsford, personally remembered or not, regarded him with respect and affection. As for the veneration—well, I shouldn't be surprised.

## XXII

### GEORGE GREY BARNARD

You may think that you have never heard the name of America's greatest sculptor. But you have. He did the statue of President Lincoln which was presented to London and accepted by Manchester. He has had bad luck with some of his statues. I am not sure that the thing he was busy on when I knew him reached the place it was built for.

At that time he lived and worked in Moret—Moret-sur-Loire near Fontainebleau, a lovely little white-washed town with cobbled streets nestling inside grey ancient walls and cavernous gates.

I had tramped down from Paris to see him, barely escaping murder in a thieves' doss-house on the way. I showed a ragged beard under a villainous sombrero, and my clothes were rusty, dusty, and torn. But I felt in tune with my surroundings until, turning an angle of a high grey garden wall, I heard English—well, American voices—and saw a slim, calm, graceful young woman, all summer flutter and sunshade, talking with a brisk little curly-haired fellow in his shirt-sleeves. He was saying: "But I leave it to you, dear." And she said resignedly: "Then I'll get beef."

When the lady had floated away, I accosted Barnard. His head came round sharply, and he stared with all his boyish blue eyes. But he was a middle-aged man.

"Yes," he said, "I'm Barnard. What can I do for you?"

I told him that I'd come to pose for him. He said

he did not want a model just then, and seemed in a hurry to get rid of me. So I handed him a letter from his old pupil, Jacob Epstein.

He took the letter and read it. Then he looked at me thoughtfully, and a strange thing happened—one of his eyes swivelled out of focus and became luminous.

“ Well, Mr. Titterton, Epstein says you were the best model in Paris. And I can see you’re well-built. Let me see your figure! ”

He turned, opened a door in the wall, and preceded me down some steep steps into a garden. It was an ordinary garden made extraordinary by a number of mediaeval statues which did not seem to belong there. To the right was a plain brick structure which might have been a factory. As in fact it was.

A skeleton wooden stairway led us up to the factory door. As Barnard opened it, I got that characteristic smell of wet clay and fixative. I saw before me a large studio in which a number of overalled sculptors were modelling figures over life size from smaller plaster-casts.

Barnard led the way to a farther studio which was almost bare. I undressed behind a curtain, and then mounted the throne. Barnard looked up at me with his thumbs in his waistcoat armholes, and the swivel-eye in full blaze.

He stayed pat for a full minute. Then he called in worse French even than mine: “ Monsieur Buard, *venez ici!* ” A little smiling man with a moustache as big as his face under a peaked cap bustled into the room.

“ *Regardez!* ” said Barnard. And they both stood and stared. Finally M. Buard said: “ *Epatant!* ” and Barnard nodded like a discontented boy.

The Frenchman burst into a torrent of talk, the burden of which was that M. Barnard must not let me go. “ No, ” said Barnard, in English. “ But why in the name of all that’s reasonable didn’t you come to

me before?" It seemed to me that no answer was demanded.

While I dressed the two conferred, and when I stood before them, dressed, with the strap of my pack in my hand Barnard made a proposition. His stoker, who looked after the hot-water system of all the studios was ill. Would I take on the job? I said that I knew nothing of the work, and would be very glad to learn. So that was settled. I was to be there at four-thirty the next morning.

Meanwhile Madame Tomas, near the river, would lodge me, and Madame Boulogne in the gatehouse gave good food.

I shan't tell you about the stoking job. You can read of that in another of my books. But there is a good story yet to tell about the *restauration* of Madame Boulogne.

At the table sat Madame and her two daughters, a few of Barnard's sculptors, and an artist who was there to paint "Sisley's country."

One of the sculptors was a big bearded fellow—the blond Northern French type, who drank a sufficiency of wine every evening, and walked home with me through the sunset streets to Madame Tomas's, where he too lodged, smiling, even burbling, but remote. Another was a young fellow fresh from the Beaux Arts, with whom I compared notes on the personages of the Quarter, and who told the most frantic lies about his wickedness as a student.

One evening they were asking me how I liked the place, and I, after thinking deeply, replied: "*Vous avez les grandes pines dans le voisinage.*" I meant to praise the forest, but achieved a compliment to the manhood of the inhabitants.

Immediately, in silence and with grave faces, Madame and her daughters rose, and went into the kitchen. As the door closed on them they burst into laughter. Then the men laughed too, and the blond Frenchman clapped me on the back and remarked:

*“Vous avez raison, mon vieux, vous avez raison. Mais il ne faut pas le dire.”* It was only then that I understood and blushed. I was still blushing when Madame and flock, grave and silent, re-entered the room.

I saw little of Barnard while I stoked for him. From four-thirty to six p.m., with intervals for rest and refreshment, I was hard at it in the cellar below the studio. I was only aware of him when he roared, and M. Buard, at once, it seemed, was down upon me with the fierce cry : “ Monsieur William, *plus chaud, plus chaud!*”

The regular stoker returned to work before Barnard was ready for me, and he put me on to picking the bits of plaster out of the used clay, and rolling the clay into handy sausages. When the stoker looked into the furnace he observed : “ Ah, well, it is not as bad as it might be. That one may say.”

After a while my job and I got tired of each other, and, having saved money in plenty, I went off to spend the winter in a log hut which I had discovered in the midst of Fontainebleau Forest. There was no door to the hut, and no floor, and no bed, and the wind rushed through the logs . . . but that is another story.

When at last Barnard was ready for me, he explained my first pose. I was to twist round and bend down, as though to hold in my hands the head of a kneeling woman who wasn’t there. I never saw the girl who will be my partner till the marble cracks. In Paris a beast of a sculptor had wanted me to pose with a girl on my lap. But Barnard kept the sexes strictly apart. Contorted as I was, and continually on the verge of cramp, I do not think I should have had any mind for creature comforts.

When he had got going on his tiny plasticine figure (at least three enlargements took place before he worked the marble) he began talking to me, telling me what he saw. Obviously he was a fine artist, but I had

never met a fine artist who talked so freely about his work. And the work seemed so much better than the talk. And all the while that swivel eye was on me.

He saw that I'd noticed that, and told me he used the unfocussed glance to get the vision. When he came to the details he got his eyes straight again. This seemed a tall order, but of course I said it was very interesting.

During the *rests* he asked me about myself. Said he'd appreciated my taking the stoker-job, and felt it was natural that I should write. As a matter of fact, he wrote too.

A few days later he took me home, and we exchanged manuscripts. He went in for parables in poetic prose. I remember very little about them. But he seemed keener on his writing than his sculpture.

I remember once, when I was posing, geese without broke into a chorus. "Ah," said Barnard, "if we understood what the geese are saying! But all we can make of it is 'Gab!'" I felt inclined to support the geese.

At another time, when something had gone wrong with the work, he said: "It's the old story, the shortest way is sometimes the longest." Then he gave me a wise look, very swivel-eyed. "But not always. Sometimes the shortest way is the shortest."

He was as eager as Epstein, but not as hungry. He talked of vision, but was content—thank goodness!—to break off when the whistle went for meals. His work made him, not ecstatic, but gay. Ecstasy he got from his parables; when sculpting he was the perfect craftsman.

Yes, this was precisely how the workman should be, as earnest and as joyous—and as business-like. It *was* a factory, and was worked like one. I had an idea that each statue had its own ledger account.

He was engaged on a colossal lot of statues—nineteen of them, I fancy—for Harrisburg, the capital of Pennsylvania. My impression is that something went

wrong with the finances on that side of the water, and that the statues never went up.

But Harrisburg sent over a deputation to see how Barnard was getting on. Oh, yes, it most certainly was some deputation.

Barnard told me that he could not be there to receive them. He had to go to some distance on other business—buying old statues, I fancy. And he asked if I would show them round and explain the statues. You see M. Buard had no English.

Well, I did that job. And I think the deputation thought it queer that a model should be the cicerone. However, we opened proceedings with a meal—not at Mme. Boulogne's—and the deputation fed me on the best wine of the country. After that I took them round, and explained both the allegory and the artistic significance of the statuary. My remarks were punctuated by the glad announcement, repeated in mellow tones by the Harrisburg architect: "Gentlemen, that group will be hew-en out of a solid block of marble weighing . . . tons, heavier than anything the great Michael Angelo ever handled."

A little fellow, whom I took to be a draper, and who had sniggered discreetly over their visit to Paris, asked if the marble would be as completely nude. "Oh," said the architect, "we'll attend to the fig-leaves over home." It appears that they attended to them too thoroughly.

When Barnard came back he was very grateful, and broached a great project. He would pay me a certain minimum salary and send me round France buying up all the best mediaeval statues. But I think it was not proposed that I should ravage them from the churches.

I told him that, while I had been willing to stoke without knowing how, the job he offered was too far beyond my equipment. He said: "You're wrong, Titterton. You'd soon learn. I did. The one thing you must look for is the *cacheté*. If the figure has

*cacheté* it's the goods. Now, I tell you, it's a great chance."

Yes, I felt that it was a great chance. I felt, when I rejected it, as I felt later on when I turned down the offer of a partnership in a Berlitz School in Munich.

From that moment Barnard knew that I was really English, and had no business initiative.

I always had the queer idea that Barnard was in Moret, in France merely because it was cheap and convenient to work there, and out of the way of deputations. I had the idea that, apart from her mediaeval statues which he bought for the American market, France itself held no interest for him. I know that when I came down a second time to pose for him, and he found that the life of the Quarter had influenced me he was profoundly shocked.

He told me that Paris was bad for me, and advised me to go home. I was wasting my time posing as a model; surely I must recognise that I had work to do in the world . . . and so on. He was perfectly right. But I, with the glamour of my escape from a frock-coat still about me, thought him a silly Puritan.

Later on an English artist said the same thing to me. But *he* said it with cold contempt; and that time, though I cursed him, I harkened.

## XXIII

### C. B. COCHRAN

HIS eyes are neutral; but everything else about him is positive: *Plus!* He is a great noise. He is The Great Noise. He is the Showman. He is the last tune on the outside. He is C. B. Cochran.

And yet he is a simple, quiet-mannered man, walking about his business cheerily and quickly yet sedately, with his immaculate hat tilted over his cheery well-polished face, and half-hiding those queer non-committal eyes. I think that in fact he does not walk much, but prefers his car. And he does much of his multifarious work lounging—a shade stiffly—in his office-chair. He takes life easily, though he eats it whole.

There is an occasional bird-swift cock of his head to warn you. Let the blast of war sound in his ears—probably over the telephone—and he leaps into action. And then barbed-wire and a *heavy* barrage wouldn't stop him.

When I heard that he was presenting "The Miracle" at Olympia—it was in 1911—I laughed. For C.B. was known to me as the man who had made England safe for Hackenschmidt and Houdini. I did not know C.B. then.

I saw "The Miracle," and I did not like it. I thought that the religious sentiment, tradition, and ritual were exploited, not used dramatically. In fact, I did not think that the doings in the arena were dramatic at all. There were a lot of people engaged, but they were just that lot. Only when the church-door opened, and you saw a clamorous crowd framed in the

doorway did there seem to be millions. But I did not see it with Cochran's eyes.

He had gazed upon empty Olympia, and dreamt of filling it with a huge pageant-play. The reason why it turned out to be this gigantic rendering of a delicate legend was that in C.B. there is a strange paradox. He loves the big and the violent; and he loves the delicate and the fine.

C.B. wandered into the Press-hut at Olympia, where we were having drinks, and watched us from under the brim of his hat. He seemed to think dramatic critics a queer lot. Anyhow, he was summing us up. And I dare say he knew what weight we should strip, and how each of us would shape in the ring. He can judge men, brain and brawn, with those quiet eyes. . . .

He jumped from the very big to the very little—it's a way of his. And the next time I saw him he was standing in the foyer of the Ambassadors, a big cigar set in a glowing smile and miles of white shirt-front. He was glisteningly happy, and he made us feel happy to look at him. ("Walk up! Walk up!")

Intimate revue was the game now. And gems he gave us. The only time the French *revue* has been seen in England! He gave us Delysia and Morton. Delysia has done other fine things since, yet none so fine; and Morton was ever after out of his element. It was all finesse—naughty and impudent. I tried to match this with "The Miracle," and gave it up. C.B. was still beyond me.

And by Jove the next three things he did were "The Man Who Married A Dumb Wife," an ironic fantasy after Anatole France, and two plays of Brieux—one, "The Three Daughters of M. Dupont," a modern domestic-tragedy, and the other "Damaged Goods," an uncommonly powerful but quite disgusting tract on syphilis.

I collided with him when he re-opened the Oxford Theatre with "The Better 'Ole." For I had a song

in it, "Way down there where the trench meanders," done as a trio by Arthur Bourchier and the other two Musketeers, Arthur "playing the 'cello" with a stick on a big box. I had a drink on the first-night with C.B., and he beamed more beautifully than ever. Old Bill suited him just as well as "The Miracle," and Anatole France, and Brieux, and Delysia. I couldn't place him. And yet it was so easy.

Then all at once his name was in everybody's mouth as the promoter of boxing-matches. Wells and Beckett, Beckett and Carpentier. That sort of thing. And he drew the town to Olympia to watch two strong men battling in the arena where once "The Miracle" had been played. He made and lost lots of money, but I don't think that bothered him.

Meanwhile he was staging all sorts of fine, gorgeous shows, mainly of the revue-musical comedy type, and getting control of all sorts of theatres. C.B. was really in the theatrical game now.

In some of the shows there were girls wearing scanty though quite decent dress. But Archie Haddon used to make big eyes at the end of the show, and say: "Titterton, did you see that girl's legs?" And then go back to the *Express*, and write about them. "Haddon's worth hundreds of pounds a week to me," Cochran might have said, and probably did say.

The other side of C.B., the side that loves the delicate and aspires to the recherché, now came into view. He produced "Cyrano de Bergerac," he brought us the "Chauve Souris," the Guitrys, "Anna Christie," and—oh, night of nights!—Eleanora Dusa. It was good to see him that night, very serious—almost solemn, very dignified, very splendid, and with his beaming smile shown only in the flame that lit those erstwhile neutral eyes.

Well, when you come to count up, there's no other man has given the London public as many fine shows.

I've only once seen Cochran angry. And then he *was* angry. It was on the first-night of "A Night in

Rome," in which Laurette Taylor, who had been immensely popular in "Peg o' My Heart," was making a matronly re-appearance. Almost as soon as the curtain went up there was disturbance in the house. Unfortunately, the curtain did not go up quite far enough, and there were genuine protests from people at the back of the gallery who could not see the action.

But the disturbance grew, and it was soon plain that a concerted attempt was being made to wreck the show. I tried to spot the gang, but they were scattered; and of course some mere fools were infected by the riot, and helped to swell it.

The row rose to a full crescendo in a scene where some of the players wore fancy dress. One male-actor had on some filmy *classical* drapery, and as soon as he appeared there were cat-calls, whistles, and cries of "You're a woman, and I can prove it." Pennies and lumps of billiard-chalk pattered on the stage.

Cochran stopped the show. The curtain was lowered. He came on, and faced the mob. His face was terrible, his eyes blazed. He said how sorry he was that Miss Taylor had been drawn into this, for he knew it was he himself the blackguards aimed at. He apologised to his patrons. There would be another first-night, when to-night's tickets would be available. He barked that out like shots from a machine-gun. The band played the "National Anthem." We trooped out, bewildered.

But I thought that a certain actor was aimed at, and the nature of the attack confirmed my impression. My wife and I walked across to the Hippodrome for a drink with Frank Boor, the genial manager, and to gossip about the event. Quex—George Nicholls—joined us. He thought it a frightful affair, being convinced that the billiard-chalk was dope. But we told him that he'd been going too much to night-clubs. Frank gave us stiff whiskies, and all was well.

Afterwards I met a member of the gang—a race gang—and he told me they did the job for five bob a

man. He did not know the name of the real paymaster—he was paid by his gang-leader—or he would not tell me. But Cochran says he knows.

If the gang were present at the deferred first-night, they did nothing to earn their money. I don't blame them. You rubbed shoulders everywhere with men, formidable and battered, whose muscles bulged beneath their dress jackets. C.B. was taking no chances : the house was well peppered with *plug-uglies*.

When I was a lad I used to visit a local fairground for the sake of the Penny-gaff. I saw "The Bells" and other wonders. That was the lure. But the show was glorified by all the other shows round me, so various, and so merry. And I was conscious of the showmen, outside their rarities, as the ultimate meaning of it all. Of course, the prime showman, the soul of the fair, was The Great Jolly Showman of the Penny-gaff. And, as I said at the beginning of this chapter, but only discovered years after I met the man, C. B. Cochran is all those showmen fused into one.

All the fun of the fair! Walk up, walk up! He'll show you every sort of marvel : Strong men wrestling, strong men boxing, circuses with a grand Rodeo, song and dance, and above all, a perfectly spiffing Penny-gaff. Only, because of that queer strain of his, in his Penny-gaff you shall sometimes see the most dainty, delicate things in the world.

Did he get that dainty strain because Aubrey Beardsley was his schoolfellow and his fellow-actor in school-shows? Perhaps! Though I rather think that C.B. was born a paradox.

I am certain that he was vowed to the fair when, as a child, he roamed through the fairs of Sussex, and gloated over the showmanship. I suspect that, being tiny, and having few pennies, he seldom *walked up*, and the showmanship seemed the fair.

He says himself that he was marked for the great game by a visit to the Brighton Grand at the age of seven to see Arthur Roberts in "Sinbad the Sailor." But that only drove him to act—and to *get the bird*.

Well, yes, it drove him to elope with a school-fellow and ship steerage to America. And though in the States C.B. discovered finally that his place is on the outside of the tent, it was there he met Richard Mansfield, became the great man's confidential secretary, and so got on the inside of the game.

Even so, he had a hard row to hoe when he came home. He took a hand at journalism, and learnt by practice how to use the Press—a knowledge that he now exploits to the gnashing envy of all other London managers.

He has managed now to fuse his two elements, and puts on shows like "Bitter Sweet," in which the whole soul of Cochran is satisfied.

And by the bye, how typical of the man was his fostering of Noel Coward! When "The Young Idea" was produced with the author in the cast, and our new great social satirist started Shaw's twins from "You Never Can Tell" on their disastrous Odessy, Cochran hailed him as a genius. When "Sirocco" failed, and Coward resolved to stick to acting, and write no more, Cochran told him not to be a fool: he was contracted to write a revue for C.B., and he must write it. That revue was written and produced, and it was a success, but Cochran clung tight hold of him, and drew out of him far better things. Cochran knew.

As characteristic was his way with old Arthur Roberts. He put that grand old man on his pay-roll at a big salary, when Roberts felt desperately sure that his day was done.

He is the next man for a theatrical knighthood; and "Sir Charles Cochran" would sound fine. But I don't think Charles is eager for the honour. I think he feels it would be a little too much like "Lord George Sanger." For he is a showman—and an artist. And there are things he would not like to exploit.

## XXIV

### GEORGE LANSBURY

EVERYBODY knows George. I suppose that he may be hated by a few dyed-in-the-wool Diehards who have never set eyes on him. But everybody who has met him loves him, even Neville Chamberlain, even Jimmy Maxton, even Cripps. He is far more avuncular than Uncle Arthur, and when he was First Commissioner of Works he went round with his pockets stuffed full of Lidos for good children. He is a Christian, he has been chief commissioner of good works down at Bow for a generation. He is the kindest of the kind, the softest of the soft; if he has a fault it is that he is all love. And yet when I was a lad I thought him a very violent man.

When I see him in his simple home at Bow, seated by the window, and holding the curtain back, so that the light falls on his greying hair, his high bald forehead, his kindly eyes with the deep bags under them, his soft cheeks and strong smiling mouth, that memory of him seems incredible.

And yet I recall him bent forward on an open-air rostrum, one fist raised, one arm outstretched, roaring like a lion at the wickedness of the rich. I remember when a meeting of Will Crooks's Labour League in the Poplar Town Hall was invaded by fierce S.D. Fers. with Lansbury at their head. And how George challenged the Leaguers to tell him what they were after—and the challenge was full of the glory and clamour of war. And how, when a Leaguer (perhaps it was old Hilditch) said we stood for the establishment of Social Democracy, George burst into a roar of

laughter that almost drowned the loud chorus of his friends.

Of course the S.D.Fers. generally were such a tough lot that we thought all those who marched, quaintly enough, under the sign-and-symbol of Hyndman's top hat were of the same kidney. It may have been that. And then George's big bellow! Perhaps at heart George was always a lamb.

But I know that I still cherished the image of the violent S.D.Fers.\* when I became the first leader-writer on the *Daily Herald*, which the comps. had just brought out.

I suppose that was why I didn't stay there. I quarrelled with Sheridan Jones, who followed Seed as editor. And I didn't realise that all would have been well if I had told my sorrows to George, who, with Bowerman, Naylor, and Tillett, was on the Board of Control.

It was an odd paper. The proletariat knew jolly well that it was their show, and that we journalists were employed to provide *matter* for them to print; the commissioners knew jolly well that we were employed to write matter to express their views. The poor journalists were between the printer-devils and the deep-red C.'s.

But we were a friendly gang—Ryan and Sam Everard and the rest, and the lads worked their guts out.

Of course I still took in the *Herald* after I'd sacked myself. Will Dyson's cartoons alone were worth twice the price of admission, and Sam's Gadflights almost as much again. Besides, there was a cheery truculence about the rag that earned it the name of *The Limit* and the occasional contributions of G. K. Chesterton.

But I know now that the truculence must often have pained Lansbury's tender soul. That was made plain when George, the editor by now, complained that there was too much hate in the paper, and Dyson's cartoons got smaller and smaller until they vanished.

However, that was years later—after the War, after  
Members of the Social Democratic Federation.

the *Herald* had been a weekly, and then had become a daily again. And there was one pre-war period when George himself was very violent indeed.

That was during the Suffragist agitation. I don't think it was Votes for Women that roused him, but the fact that women were being savagely ill-treated by men. Not that Uncle George could have approved of the violence of the ladies! As a regular church-goer, for example, the burning of a church must have distressed him. But the women suffered so proudly, and they suffered so much that George became their unbridled champion. Well, he went to prison. But that is a little thing for George.

You all know that he was the High Priest of what old gentlemen in West End clubs called Poplarism. Which means that George thought that if the community pretends to relieve the poor it should relieve them thoroughly. He was never a man for half-measures, and I think it is an achievement that in Poplar, while he or one of his henchmen was Mayor, and in boroughs that followed suit, Bumble came to be regarded as a friend.

In Parliament, George was for long a member of the Left Wing of the Labour Party, but even then he was the despair of Jimmy Maxton, who was not all for love.

The fact is that George still dreamt dreams. I know what those dreams were, for I shared them once. Socialism was less an economic creed with him, and still less a bureaucratic system, than a means of bringing about the reign of kindness, justice, freedom, and beauty upon earth. It was a religion; and politics, even the politics of his party, seemed all dodgery and compromise.

But when the second Labour Government came in George was persuaded to take the Board of Works, where, thought his leaders, they would be safe from his loving brick-bats, and the old boy couldn't do any harm.

He was the one quite successful minister. Opponents, yes, and even fellow-ministers, agreed that the old boy did wonderful things with the parks. Transformed them. Go along any sunny day, and see for yourself those square miles of mirth!

It gladdened George's heart. He confided to me once, when I met him in the House, how sick he got sometimes, when he remembered all they'd fought for in his early manhood, to wander through the Parliamentary corridors of precedent and intrigue. "At least," he said, "I've been able to do something for the young things. And they're what matter. Not you and me." This is how it all began :

His mother was Welsh. His father was a contractor in a small way. "I don't know what he made," says George, "something between two or three hundred a year perhaps. We were very lower-middle-class people. But we always had enough—indeed, we were able to help those around us in Whitechapel, and mother often provided one or two dinners on Sunday for those in need."

As a boy of nine or ten he used to mix with *Fenian lads*, as he calls them, of his own age. "We used to sing *God Save Ireland*" (it was the time of the Manchester Martyrs) "as zealously as the grown-ups, though I, for one, didn't know much about it."

I said this was a strange beginning for one who was now so opposed to violence. He agreed. "I've been opposed to violence all my life. Perhaps I need to make that clear. During the best part of my life I've been a revolutionary. But I always thought violence wrong—and futile. You cannot coerce people into the Kingdom of Heaven.

"I have talked this out with Lenin and Trotsky. Lenin said : 'Well, if you think you can get it your way, go and get it! I think you'll have to have a bloody social revolution.' Trotsky was frankly scornful of my palliatives and passivism. But I know now that I was right."

Good old George! So gentle-hearted! And yet he is one of the few Socialist leaders that I can see fighting at the barricades.

“However,” he says, “I grew up in an atmosphere of enthusiasm for Gladstone’s defence of the smaller nationalities—as, for instance, Bulgaria against Turkey. That stirred me. I have” (and the old grey head rises proudly) “always been with those who championed the weak against the strong. For instance, I was for Bradlaugh, though I’m a Christian, when that Atheist M.P. refused to take the Oath.”

Then he migrated to Australia. And it was a big change. “Yes, big,” says George. “For I’d never known want. I’d seen it all round me, and sympathised. But I’d never *known* it. Following my father in his business, I’d lived as securely as a man can live in this competitive state.

“I left all that security, and went to Australia to live by my own labour. With me went my wife, three babies, and a younger brother I had to look after. I worked on a farm, in a slaughter-house, anywhere. . . . I broke stones. I learnt to know what unemployment meant, what tyranny meant. For the first time I felt, yes, *felt* the ton-weight pressure of our economic system on the poor.

“I came back determined to champion the poor. I came back, not hardened, I hope, but toughened, a man.

“Well, I soon found myself in politics—for the Liberals. But I met many Socialist leaders, such as Hyndham and Herbert Burrows, and Socialism kept sinking in. I became friends with Samuel Montague, afterwards Lord Swathling, and ran one election for him—in 1886. And then I was tempted.

“Montague wanted me to get into Parliament, and offered me meanwhile the post of manager for him in Whitechapel (it amounted to being election agent) at the tremendous salary, for me, of six pounds a week.

“Now by this time I had a big family, and my weekly wage was thirty shillings. So—I was tempted.

But the offer made me know, all of a sudden, my change of mind. I was no longer a Liberal. I had come to believe that Liberalism was for a class and Socialism for the good of all. So my wife and I decided to stick to the thirty bob.

“Mind you,” says the old fellow modestly, “I don’t want to make myself out a martyr. I haven’t suffered for that decision. But it has made all the difference to my life. And it’s brought me the happiest experiences.

“Then began my long career as a Socialist agitator. And if you would understand *that*, you must know that in the same year I became a *Guardian*.”

Yes, that was the one vital fact that I had not known.

“I kept myself fresh and revolutionary by weekend propaganda” (indeed he did) “but the rest of my time, when not earning my living, I have been busy with palliatives. I’ve always held the doctrine that ‘you must let things go to the worst in order that a smash may come’ to be the doctrine of the devil. Those who love their fellows *must* want to help them. And it’s silly to say you want to transform society, and then refuse to transform it.

“So I’ve had to behave very often in an unrevolutionary manner, to approve of things I don’t approve of, so that I could do a little good to the poor and the weak.” Good Old George!

“In a way,” he says, “I owe most to the fact that I’ve lived for sixty-four years in the East End, and so have learnt to know the infinite courage and kindness of the poor. It is they and their selfless, nameless helpers of all creeds have taught me that, beyond all theories, the key to the world’s happiness is in the sentence: ‘Little children, love one another!’ And the worship of God means selfless service of your fellow men and women.”

That’s the creed, and that’s the practice of George Lansbury.

## XXV

### PAUL ROBESON

THE first time I saw Paul Robeson was in the office at the Ambassadors Theatre. He was with James Light, of the Provincetown Players. James, a bosom pal of Paul's and Eugene O'Neill's, had come over from the States to fix up the production of "The Emperor Jones" at the Ambassadors.

They made a startling couple. The blackness and hugeness of Paul were emphasised terrifically by the slightness and whiteness of Light. Paul was the one very tall man I had met who did not stoop to you : he towered. His face was black marble, his smouldering eyes pondered, his smile was awfully calm and kind.

Admirably poised, perfectly dressed and mannered, he wore civilisation with a casual ease. And Light fussed amiably round him.

" You don't like negroes, Mrs. Titterton," said Paul to my wife, when they had shaken hands.

" I spent my childhood in the States," said my wife. " You are the only man of colour that I have ever shaken hands with."

" Thank you," said Paul ; and he meant it.

I was doing Press publicity for the show, and Light had told me that nobody knew Paul who hadn't heard him sing negro spirituals. So I arranged with Ralph Stock the novelist-and-playwright to bring some notables and a distinguished Pressman to his house-boat on the Thames to hear Paul sing.

Stock had converted an ex-submarine chaser or minelayer or something into a scrumptious floating

villa, which he kept moored off the Chelsea Embankment within easy scull of a practicable pub.

We went there one evening—I took down the distinguished journalist, Captain George Nicholls, better known as Quex. The other notables, beside Paul, were Miss Tennyson Jesse the novelist, H. M. Harwood her husband, playwright and lessee of the Ambassadors, Miss Athene Seyler the actress, and Nicholas Hannan the actor with his son.

We talked haphazard in the long saloon, and drank cocktails as an excuse for the conversation. Then the lights were switched off, and through the open windows the far thin night-cries of the river drifted.

Robeson sat, dimly seen in the dark—little more than a mass—with his hands on his knees.

And then out of the dark came the voice. It did not seem to come from Robeson. It hovered in the air, it filled the saloon, it rushed out of the windows, and the echo of it seemed to come back to us mixed with the night-cries.

It was not the voice of a man, but of a people, a people oppressed and suffering, pouring out their soul in lamentation.

Suddenly the voice ceased. And we listened in vain for the echo. Nothing but the separate tiny noises of the night.

Again the voice sang, but now exultantly. It was like a trumpet. *Hallelujah!* With a clash the doors of heaven flung wide, and the slaves set free walked all over God's heaven.

The last song died away, the lights were switched on; and there was Robeson, with his hands on his knees, gazing with an expressionless face and brooding eyes at the opposite wall.

Only when the buzz of talk broke out did I realise what a marvellous voice he had.

Well, "The Emperor Jones" was put on at the Ambassadors. Do you know the play? Most of the time you watch Jones, running and lost in the African

forest; and listen to those devilish insistent tom-toms of the savages that are drawing him to them, back to the primeval life. Those tom-toms possessed the theatre, they hammered on the brain, they knocked at the heart, it was an agony.

It was an agony we shared with that huge black runaway, wide-eyed and panting, and so utterly afraid that pallor seemed to show through the midnight of his face. As the tom-toms drummed and drummed and drummed all round us, in our path darted up tree-trunks that showed leering faces, and round our limbs and neck whipped branches that were snakes. And the tom-toms drummed-drummed-drummed as we ran and gasped and panted, louder and louder though we fled from them, until at last they had us, and we sank before them prostrate, dead.

As a matter of fact, the house was too small for the tragedy. The huge gestures of Robeson threatened to tear down the walls, the noise of the tom-toms was too painful to us, who should have been the sympathetic witnesses of the Emperor's pain. And, indeed, for any house, I think that the agony lasts too long.

But Robeson was magnificent. It was wonderful, it was dreadful to see the runaway lose his civilisation, tatter by tatter, and slip back to the primeval.

The next time I saw Robeson was at Drury Lane. He was playing in "The Show Boat," or rather he sang one song. But that one song made the play. The adaptors had treated a fine book very cruelly. Without "Ole Man River" the play would not have run three months. I don't need to tell you how Robeson sang, for most of you heard him. But I tell you that it was nothing to the way he sang aboard Ralph Stock's house-boat on the Thames.

Not long ago I went to Robeson to ask him to tell me the story of his life. This is what he told me :

" The present moment, when I have had a warning from my voice to give it a rest, is a good one in which

to cast the eyes back on travelled roads. And my eyes go back to the days when I was a child in Princeton, New Jersey.

“ That child knew, knew in his bones, that his father had been a slave. In fact, he heard again and again in his home of the agonised escape from slavery.

“ In his childish imagination he pictured the men and women of his race labouring with bent back on the plantations under the lash of the overseer. He saw his father suddenly running—that’s what he saw : the figure of a black man running, running with the bloodhounds after him; running until his eyes were bloodshot, his breath coming in dreadful hoarse gasps, and there was a knife at his heart and in his side.

“ This wasn’t the picture of an individual story merely. Most American negroes of my generation have in them an ancestral memory of that pitiless chase.

“ Now I don’t want to give that small boy more highly developed powers of reflection than he possessed. So I won’t suppose that, looking around the streets of Princeton, he saw an ironical anti-climax to his father’s story. But he might have seen it.

“ There were no overseers with whips in Princeton, but there was a spiritual barbed-wire fence to guard the whites from the blacks.

“ Like every other university town, the life of Princeton revolved round the college. Most of those who attended my father’s church worked in or about the college; the white townsfolk depended a deal for their trade on the undergraduates, and all took their tone from them.

“ Now it happened that, though Princeton is in the North, at that time most of the undergraduates came from the South. They brought with them the Southerner’s idea of the negro. And I think they emphasised it more in the North than they would have done in their own homes.

" Anyhow, the Princeton negro was regarded as a pariah! There were special schools for coloured children—up to the age of fourteen—after that nothing. The plea was that beyond a certain point it was money and time wasted trying to educate a child with a black skin.

" Negro parents who wished their children to go to a secondary school had to send them to one twenty miles away, and pay for them, instead of getting the schooling free.

" But in my case that wasn't necessary. When I was eight my father moved from Princeton. And that's the second event which has had a tremendous effect on my life.

" Here I must go back to beginnings. Being very proud of my race and knowing the tendency to attribute any fine qualities in a negro to the few drops of blood of any other race he may have, I have always insisted upon calling myself a negro. And surely I look like one. But I must tell you something about my mother, and a further racial heritage.

" My mother sprang from Pennsylvanian Quaker stock with a fine tradition of culture. She came of mixed blood—negro, Indian and white.

" One of her ancestors, Samuel Bustill, was an intimate of Benjamin Franklin, and is often mentioned in the latter's memoirs. So it came about that my elder brother was educated solely by her until he was ready to go to the university in what is equivalent to the second year's course at Oxford.

" He was a great man, and he became a fine physician. If he had lived I think he would have made his name in experimental medicine.

" It was my great ill-fortune that my mother died when I was six. But her influence survived, and helped to mould me.

" And perhaps it was partly her influence which persuaded my father to take the heroic step of changing from the ministry in the Presbyterian Church and

accepting a call to a Wesleyan-Methodist chapel in Somerville, N.J., where there was a mixed school.

“ You understand what that meant. I sat on the same school bench with white children. I often went to dinner with some man of high repute in the place or played with his children. And then I came home to the humble folk to whom my father ministered.

“ As I grew up the old memory of persecution was overlaid, the childish impressions of Princeton were forgotten. I was able to regard myself simply as one human being among others, white or black.

“ If we had stayed at Princeton I might have been a fanatic. As it is, I got balance, and I have realised that beyond the negro problem there is the much more important *human* one.

“ That was why I felt no embarrassment when I went to Rutgers, a fine old University founded in 1766. I received my A.B., or B.A., as you call it, in 1919, after spending four of the happiest years of my life there.

“ The other day Rutgers conferred on me the honorary M.A. I believe I am the youngest to get it in its history.

“ As you know, perhaps, I studied law at Columbia. I practised a little. But then the stage caught me. We had some amateur theatricals at the University, and Gene O'Neill, the dramatist, saw me in them.

“ *That was an important event for me.* O'Neill soon had me away from the law. And among the Provincetown Players I not only found a field for whatever acting ability I possess, but a number of wonderful friends—Gene himself and James Light, who simply *must* direct me in all my plays.

“ The final touch seemed the merest accident. Lawrence Brown sat down at the piano one day, and played some of the negro spirituals he remembered from his youth. And I stood beside him and sang.

“ He and I had heard them at those great camp meetings, which are like nothing else on earth, where

a people long oppressed break out in an ecstasy at their deliverance, where the old voices are heard—the cry of the slave calling on heaven for help; the hallelujah of the slave seeing in a vision the happy freedom of heaven.

“As he played and I sang we seemed to catch the true expression of our race.

“You know what people have said about my voice. But the way I put it is that one branch of the human family has something tremendous to say, and I am fortunate enough to be one of its mediums of expression.

“That is why I am taking care of my voice. Whatever gods there be have given it me with a purpose. With all humility, I can say that I feel I was born to sing.

“My father had a lot to do with my training. He was a marvellous orator, as so many of the negro preachers are. And when I was quite small he used to stand me up and teach me to orate.

“Shakespeare has helped me, too. I don’t know what sort of a job I made of Othello, but I know that saying those marvellous lines gave me quite new ideas of the magic of words. When I went back after that to America they said how much better I was singing.

“I am first a singer of negro songs. And when I sang in Chicago, for example, the well-to-do negroes there, aping American culture, were annoyed that I did not sing the usual classic repertoire.

“Collision with such negro mentality has made me very sad and had a great influence upon my future artistic life. For further true negro inspiration I now know I must look to Africa.

“Soon enough, God knows, the negro race will be lost track of in the American melting-pot. Let us, before it is too late, give the essential Negro idea to the world. It is something unique.

“The oldest white culture in America was only an importation from England. Other white immigrants

have brought other strains of European culture with them.

“ We, the negroes, have the oldest indigenous culture of America, though with far-flung roots in Africa. It would be a catastrophe if we should disappear as a race and, like the Red Indians, leave no authentic record behind.

“ I like singing songs of any nation when I have learnt to know the nation. I am learning Russian so as to sing Russian songs based upon folk tradition. Especially I understand the songs of a folk that has been oppressed. But I shall always be, above everything else, a singer of negro spirituals, a mouthpiece for the spirit of my race.”

Of late, I may be wrong, but so it seems to me, Paul has lost direction. He should get back, back perhaps to Jimmy Light, and Gene O'Neill, and the other guys of the Provincetown Players—anyhow back to the simple things that Paul Robeson really enjoys.

## XXVI

### FATHER VINCENT McNABB

FATHER VINCENT strides all over London in his Dominican habit, covering a good four miles an hour with his army boots, and looking like a figure of Winged Victory when you see him topping a rise. So I saw him once in the rain, as I waited in a church-yard beside an open grave.

Years ago I used to meet him in company with Cecil Chesterton. He was a great friend of Cecil's, very heartily an admirer of that brave, simple man. But I observed merely that he was a wise and kindly priest. It was the sermon he preached at the Catholic Church in Maiden Lane in memory of his friend that showed me the quality of the man.

Then first I saw that keen, strong, thought-worn face alive, alight. He was eloquent, and his eloquence was not a conscious ornament, but the flame of his soul. He was courageous, and his courage was as instinctive, as unconscious as his eloquence. You took that for granted : this was a man. But beyond all else shone out his loving-kindness, his simplicity, his humility. He was as bold as a lion for his friend—impeaching those responsible for Cecil's death of murder; and yet you were sure that the proud spirit would accept all injuries to himself with meekness.

A proud spirit? Yes! A man who might have led armies, a man who might have been a prime leader of Sinn Fein, a man in whom by nature the hot blood rose to meet opposition. And yet a man trained in the ways of humility by what tremendous power of self-subjection!

Once we were speaking of another monk of his order, and Father Vincent said: "Ah, yes, he's a saint. Would to God I had his patience. My wretched temper! . . ." The dear passionate humble saint!

While I assisted G.K.C. on the *New Witness* and *G.K.'s Weekly*, I corresponded frequently with Father Vincent and met him occasionally. He sent me articles written in finely sculptured script upon odds and ends of paper, the leavings of old MSS. And his envelopes were used ones re-addressed. For he practised as well as preached economy. He did not forget that St. Thomas Aquinas wrote his masterpiece upon scraps of damaged parchment. (Afterwards, long afterwards, he told me that he polished and softened his army boots with the sweat of his body.)

Then one day I got an invitation to go down to Hawkesyard Priory, near Rugeley in Staffordshire, to speak on the Press to the Dominican Fathers and their pupil-friars. I was not yet a Catholic, nor had some others asked down for similar occasions been of the Faith. We were supposed to know something of our subject, that was all.

I was met at the railway station by the Prior. When we got to the Priory, since mealtime was passed and everybody else was busy, the Prior himself served me at table. Then came the talk and the discussion—as free and as merry a discussion as ever I heard. Father Vincent intervened as the jester. I remember that he said: "The lecturer has told us that his favourite drink is beer; I should have said that it was *The Sack*."

He frolicked like a happy schoolboy. It was difficult to associate him with the flaming spirit of denunciation in the Maiden Lane pulpit. Well, they all frolicked, while with admirable acuteness they picked the wheat-grains from my chaff. But he was the gay schoolboy of them all. The Fathers entertained me during the evening, giving me wine and a

cigar—they had cigarettes. The talk flitted from subject to subject, the boldest points of view were taken with infinite zest, and the Prior summed up. Laughter?—bursts of it. These hard-working thinkers and teachers were having a night off. Father Vincent said I had given him the text for a sermon. It was this: “Should woman be the helpmate, the playmate, or the checkmate of man?”

And then the next morning I went to the Priory Church, and saw some of the monks before the altar. I, an outsider, and feeling terribly far away, watched in wonder, in awe, these playfellows of the eve so infinitely prostrated, so miraculously caught up.

Oh, by the bye, the Prior of to-day would be the simple monk of to-morrow. Father Vincent had once been Prior.

When we started a League to popularise the economic views peculiar to *G.K.’s Weekly*, Father Vincent was one of our most frequent speakers. He had moved to St. Dominic’s Priory, Hampstead, then, and had become known to Londoners as a speaker in the parks. For he loved a mixed audience, and he welcomed the rough-and-tumble debate of the open air.

He must have thought us a pretty hopeless gang. We were all convinced of the burning need to carry our economic creed into practise, and we did nothing. That was the theme of most of his addresses: “Why don’t you do things?” He told us, in fact, to leave the cities of the plain, and go back to the land.

On one such occasion I replied that I should be not the slightest use as a farmer, and I held up my cramped hands, incapable of anything but writing. If I were young and unmarried I might venture, I said, but for any man of my age and incapacity to go farming would be a folly; for one who was married and had a family it would be a crime.

That roused the old man to a burst of rhetoric which laid me flat and helpless. I can assure you that it is a tremendous experience to face that thunder and light-

ning. It was a little terrifying, and I breathed deep when it was over.

Then Father Vincent leant across to me, and said that he had only chastened me because he loved me. There was a laugh at that; but it was true.

When he left us early for his long walk home to Hampstead, he came across and took my hand in both his own. In truth I think he was already sorry for his burst of righteous indignation. I wager he set himself a penance for it, the dear, passionate humble saint.

Father Vincent is a learned man, a notable theologian, philosopher, and economist, and a chief authority on the life and works of St. Thomas Aquinas. He is also a practical farmer.

When he went to Hawkesyard Priory he was Prior and Director of Studies, so his head and his hands were full. Something must be done to keep his health up. So he went back to the land—of the Priory—and taught himself farming.

He practised it for six years, and he will tell you how swiftly an ordinary uninstructed man can make himself competent to dig a living out of the land. All this he learnt while he was working, far harder than I or most of you have ever worked, at his vocation.

He learnt, too, the way in which all the country crafts—of the smith, the carpenter, the saddler, and the rest—cluster round the most ancient of all crafts. He found out what are the roots of social life; well, St. Thomas had shown him that already, but he worked it out with his own body, and then fired a vehement assault on the modern world.

You have not heard of that assault? You had not heard until now of Father Vincent? I can well believe you. The men who leave the profoundest impress on one generation are often almost unknown until the next.

Throughout his life he has been inspired by a dream. "I have always been a dreamer," he told me with his rare smile, as he stood and I sat in his bare,

stone-paved cell in St. Dominic's Priory. And when I asked what was the dream, he knelt, and said : "Let me dream on my knees ! "

As a lad he was an ardent lover of his country, Ireland, and his indignation had been stirred by the tale of her wrongs. He determined to be revenged. By fire and sword? No! That would have been the natural course for the fierce young Vincent McNabb to take. But already the great Power which was to shape his life had hold of him, and he chose another way.

He remembered, he told me, the story of Patrick, the runaway slave, who, to revenge himself on his oppressors, took to them the great gift which he had had from Heaven.

And so, when young Vincent entered religion, the dream of his heart was to give back to England what she possessed when she was Merry England.

That is why this man who is Irish to the marrow has spent the years of his working life in England. And he has come to love her. "I love England more than Ireland," he said to me. "Ireland I love as a mother, but England I love as a wife."

Wife! Yes, that reminds me. At a debate between Father Vincent and Bernard Shaw I accused Shaw of having always been hostile to the family. Shaw said in reply that he failed to understand why I attacked him on this ground, he being a married man of long standing. It would have been more reasonable to go for Father McNabb, who was a professional bachelor.

Said Father Vincent: "One reason why I did not marry was out of consideration for the possible Mrs. Vincent McNabb—whom I have never met." And I knew the meaning of the whimsical smile on his face as well as any there present.

For I remembered how he had said to me: "Married love? Why that is the greatest temporal gift to man. God knows what a monk gives up when he makes that sacrifice—never to be husband and

father. The sacrifice is infinitely well worth while; but I wish the world would understand how great it is."

All his life Father Vincent has fought for the family—its dignity, security, freedom. England is for him a collection of families, menaced on the one hand by the tyranny and on the other hand by the licence of modern society. Never is his indignation more thunderous than when he attacks the reformers who are bent on destroying parental authority and husbands and wives who refuse the marvellous privilege of parenthood.

"Compared with the wife who refuses to have children," he cried aloud at a Devereux Tavern meeting, "the poor unmarried girl who has a child is pure." He paused, and then went on solemnly: "If this devil's business continues, it may be necessary for us monks to come out into the world, and take up the task of parenthood."

But he is blissfully happy in the House of Dominic. A house set on a hill. Taking me over it, he said: "You see, we are the only craftsmen now who live over their shop. This"—the library—"is our workshop. And our market is all round us at our doors.

"This is the true economic unit," he adds with a smile, "where the area of production is co-terminous with the area of consumption." And indeed all and sundry of St. Pancras and Hampstead come to the shop for help in the troubles of daily life.

But Father Vincent goes a-preaching farther afield than Hampstead Heath. You have seen him at my own little League. He makes more adventurous forays. He will talk to anybody, and not so long ago —while Joynson-Hicks was the Home Secretary—he addressed an audience of Atheist-Communists. The meeting was to have been held in a hall controlled by the Home Office, and the Home Secretary banned it. In the end they found a Baths belonging to a Borough, and there Father Vincent met and conquered his doughty adversaries.

Not long ago I brought a Scottish artist to make a sketch of him. My friend was a man with all the Presbyterian Scot's love of intellectual debate. And Father Vincent leapt into the battle like a war-horse. The sketch was done (incidentally, my friend has done better): it was the talk that mattered to them both. After an hour, two hours, I don't know, I tore my Scot away. At the door of the Priory, Father Vincent and he were still joyously debating.

Father Vincent was brought up in Belfast. He was a seventh son, who, says he slyly, "is always the wisest man in the kingdom." His father was an old sea-captain with business in the shipyards, and he took young Vincent round with him.

It was this peep at commerce that raised his indignation against modern industrialism. The Tyne was then one of the richest rivers in the world. And yet, says he, Tyneside was utterly degraded. "It puzzled me then, but when I had the blessed privilege of entering religion I understood."

What was the secret? "The Tyne was living on its capital. As America was when I saw it in 1913. Yes, even then, feverishly. And we're all doing it now. And none of the economists of the big-business world has the faintest idea what is wrong."

Standing with his hands in the sleeves of his habit and his head cocked sideways, he gave a knowing smile and a nod, and then with his hand up and his eyes shining, as though he saw a vision, cried: "And all the time the good brown earth of England lies waiting—that good brown earth that I have knelt and kissed, earth that I have ploughed and sown. . . ."

He went backward, and stood tight against the wall in the corner of the room, as though at bay.

"When will they listen? The land of England is going to waste. It has been getting worse ever since the Reformation. But it is being ruined now at a faster rate. In thirty years, God help us, it may not be an economic proposition to reclaim it. Listen to

the figures"—he takes up a blue-book, and turns the dead statistics into flashing pictures—"I'm always reading blue-books" (with a shy, apologetic smile). "I find them so much more exciting than novels!"

He will turn from the blue-book to the Encyclical of the Pope on finance and socialism, and from that to St. Thomas Aquinas, and from that to a press-cutting, and then he will put all these by, and tell you what he heard the other day from a simple woman of St. Pancras.

"St. Pancras!" says Father Vincent, "it's strange that I should be spending the last years of a long life in St. Pancras before I go to Paradise by way of Kensal Green."

Strong as a lion he has been, and he still looks the sturdy old warrior. But he feels that any day now he may get his call.





